

Weekly

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50 years of dispossession



As Israel and the West celebrated the 50th anniversary of "the Jewish State", Palestinians continued to till their ever shrinking, water starved land. *(photo: Randa Shaath)*

Fated to fail

The Middle East peace summit in London appeared doomed even before it started. **Khaled Dawoud** reports from the British capital

"Today, the question is put to Mr Netanyahu: do you want to put the peace process back on track, or will you be held responsible for all the chaos and negative consequences that will follow the failure of this process?" The question was posed by Saeb Erekat, chief Palestinian negotiator, who insisted that the main achievement of London's two-day Middle East peace talks was to expose to the world just who is actually obstructing the peace process.

For Western analysts, the fact that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright gave the Israeli premier only five days to accept American proposals for a 13.1 per cent withdrawal from the West Bank before yet another round of talks in Washington, this time chaired by President Bill Clinton, signifies US impatience at Netanyahu's intransigence.

But judging by the London experience and endless other rounds of US, European, Egyptian and Jordanian-mediated negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians since Netanyahu came to power two years ago, there can be no guarantees that the Washington meeting will produce any progress in a peace process that has been effectively paralysed for 14 months.

In addition, informed sources fear that Washington might put pressure on the Palestinians to accept Netanyahu's offer of a maximum 11 per cent withdrawal from the West Bank, on condition that this will be the last stage of redeployment before beginning final status talks. Should the Palestinians accept such a proposal they will enter final status negotiations with full control of just 14 per cent of the West Bank, civilian control of a further 25 per cent, and 40 per cent control in Gaza. And given the length of negotiations on interim issues and the early stages of withdrawal, Netanyahu has every reason to be confident that thornier issues such as settlements and the return of Palestinian refugees will be drawn out over innumerable stages, likely to occupy a decade or more.

Netanyahu has proved adept at finding excuses, something at which he will undoubtedly continue to excel. Arafat is not cracking down on Hamas, the number of Palestinian police is higher than stated in the Oslo agreements, the PLO charter must be changed, the US must guarantee that Arafat will not declare an independent state. And then, of course, there is his excuse of last resort, the need to consult with the hard-line members of his coalition, the very people who threatened to bring him down should he concede more than nine per cent of land to the Palestinians.

Probably those most annoyed by the London meetings were the British journalists and Whitehall officials who were forced to spend their 4 May Bank Holiday chaperoning the fruitless negotiations. The limousine diplomacy and convoys of cars carrying Madeleine Albright, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Netanyahu between their various hotels in central London proved to be nothing but a waste of time. Meanwhile, the entertaining puzzle for reporters who had nothing to do but to stand for long hours in front of different hotels was to argue over percentages, the nine per cent or 11 per cent offered by Israel, the 13.1 per cent demanded by the Americans and the 30 per cent stated in the Oslo agreements.

Even before the talks opened the parties involved were playing down expectations of any significant progress. Warnings that the failure of the London talks would signify "the death of the peace process" constitute, in the end, little more than catchy headlines easily ignored by Netanyahu. And with the US at the steering wheel of the peace process, Israel's prime minister remains confident that he will not be pressured into making concessions by a Democratic administration with its eyes firmly fixed on the next presidential elections.

And at British Prime Minister Tony Blair's opening meetings with Netanyahu and Arafat, British officials were keen to stress that London was nothing more than "a venue for the talks".

Meanwhile, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Dore Gold, was busy claiming, more than a little disingenuously, that the Oslo Accords mentioned no percentages for redeployment in the West Bank and indicated only further redeployment, a peculiar way to describe an agreement that clearly calls for Israeli redeployment out of all Palestinian-populated towns and villages in the West Bank. Gold also repeatedly spoke of the Likud's security fears. "This issue of percentages is not a debate over a tip in a restaurant," he told reporters. "Every single per cent is 55 square kilometres, the size of all of Tel Aviv. This threatens Israel's defence along the West Bank defence barrier," he added.

Gold also repeated Netanyahu's statement that Israel "had already gone the extra mile" in trying to make peace with the Palestinians. Quite what this extra mile was no one seemed sure, though one leading British Middle East commentator quipped that "Netanyahu's extra mile was the distance that Israel's latest Jewish settlement extended into occupied Arab land."

British press reports on the meeting tended to concentrate on the irony of Netanyahu and Arafat staying less than a mile away in the same city but refusing to meet face to face. The frail and fatigued appearance of Arafat also gave rise to speculation on the Palestinian leader's health.

Perhaps the most exciting scene that took place as the London talks opened on Monday was the side show of three small demonstrations which took place in front of 10 Downing Street when Blair was meeting with Netanyahu and Arafat. Some 40 Israelis sympathetic to the Peace Now group active in Israel chanted slogans in Hebrew and English calling for a two-state solution and raising banners calling for the release of Vanounou, incarcerated in Israeli jails for more than 11 years now after revealing its nuclear capabilities to a British newspaper. Shortly afterwards, four Israelis dressed as rabbis came towards reporters handing them statements by the "Coalition for Israel". The statement announced their opposition to "surrendering additional land to Arafat, not 11 per cent and not one centimetre of retreat from Jewish land." "Not one inch" and "no retreat from promised land" they chanted.

Hot on their heels came 60 heavily veiled women and bearded men, mostly of Pakistani origin, carrying a black flag and shouting "bomb... bomb Israel, gas, gas Israel. What do you want? Jihad. When do you want it? Now." The three groups stood next to each other, separated by policemen. The Jihad supporters burned the Israeli flag while Peace Now watched on with confusion. The four rabbis beat a sudden retreat, no doubt citing security reasons.

Netanyahu threat

ISRAELI Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu warned yesterday he might reject an invitation to proposed Middle East talks in Washington if the Americans tried to dictate the scope of an Israeli troop withdrawal.

Netanyahu convened his nine-member inner cabinet to discuss what the Israeli press described as a US ultimatum — Israeli acceptance of an American proposal for a 13 per cent withdrawal or cancellation of a White House ceremony next Monday to launch final status talks.

The full cabinet of 17 ministers was expected to make the final decision on the US proposal on Sunday.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright issued the invitation after two days of separate talks in London with Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat that failed to achieve a breakthrough.

She said President Clinton was prepared to host the two sides for long-delayed talks on a final peace accord but only if interim issues were resolved in advance — an allusion to the US proposal that Israel hand over another 13 per cent of West Bank land to Palestinian self-rule.

Netanyahu, referring to the American proposal, told Israel radio: "I don't want to get into details here but the United States knows what we can do and what we can't do. We don't accept dictates."

The prime minister went on: "Of course the United States is important to us, and to this government. But we need to remind everyone that we are not a sub-state of the United States. We are a sovereign state."

After declaring Tuesday night that he would go to Washington, Netanyahu left open the possibility that he might not go if there were too many strings attached.

Asked if rejecting an invitation from such a crucial ally was even an option, Netanyahu responded: "Possibly. Am I obligated to accept every invitation on any condition?"

He said that if the United States was telling him that his presence in Washington was linked to his acceptance of the US proposal as is, "then I am very doubtful that this summit will come to be."

Arafat, who arrived Tuesday night in Morocco, welcomed Clinton's invitation. The Palestinian leader was expected in Cairo today for consultations with President Hosni Mubarak.

Talking up the trade

Greater South-South cooperation and better terms for economic relations with the North are among G-15 hopes for next week's Cairo summit, writes **Dina Ezzat**

This Monday Cairo will host the eighth summit of the G-15, the economic grouping of the strongest economies in the developing world. The gathering will be inaugurated by President Hosni Mubarak and is to be attended by a number of heads of state and government.

It convenes at a time when the nations of Southeast Asia, some of which are group members, continue to reel in the aftermath of the crisis that undermined Asian financial markets, while yet other members are passing through critical phases of their economic reform programmes and at a time when developing nations are making an attempt to capture a larger slice of the international market to help combat high unemployment rates.

"Economic groupings of countries with similar interests and conditions are the norm now, and they do serve the economic interests of their member-states," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, highlighting the importance of the upcoming summit. In other words, said Moussa, the G-15 "can help formulate the shape of the world's future economy," although it has to acknowledge the economic gap between South and North.

The G-15, first established in 1989, has two major objectives in its coming summit: to promote economic cooperation and trade among member-states and to minimise the socio-economic cost of globalisation and domestic reform programmes. On both fronts the group has already taken a number of significant steps.

Indeed, it was thanks to the collective efforts of the G-15 that attempts to impose international trade regulations that would have denied the poorer countries their cheap labour advantage were stopped. "The objection of developed countries to labour conditions and child labour, which help reduce production costs, overlooks the fact that such phenomena are a result of the poverty faced by developing nations," said Mounir Zahran, President Mubarak's representative at the summit.

G-15 has been particularly active in combatting the non-stop attempts of advanced countries to get multi-national corporations to close their factories in developing countries, where labour is cheap, under the pretext of fighting poor labour conditions, and have these factories relocated in the richer countries to help create more job opportunities and boost their own economies.

Today, there is room for similar collective efforts to minimise the high price of globalisation that developing countries face. As an off-shoot of the G-77 and the Non-Aligned Movement, the G-15 is is in a position to help developing economies secure a bigger share of the international market.

Next week's summit will take place shortly before the ministers of trade of the member-states of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are scheduled to meet in Geneva to consider more globalisation measures. "The recommendations of the G-15 at its Cairo summit will be taken into consideration by the WTO meeting," said Zahran.

The summit also comes before a meeting that should shortly take place between the G-7, the big industrial nations, and the G-24, a Washington-based economic grouping that attends World Bank sessions and includes some G-15 members.

"President Mubarak has already addressed a message to British Prime Minister Tony Blair in which he highlighted a number of important issues in the South-North economic cooperation," said Moussa.

The G-15 is actually now a G-15 plus one. Members include Algeria, Senegal, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Jamaica, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Mexico and Egypt, countries that are home to 30 per cent of the world's population and that account for 39 per cent of the Third World's GDP.

Inter-trade among members, though, is limited and one objective of the coming summit, with its side-line trade fair and businessmen's forum, is to highlight the available facilities and opportunities for cooperation.

There are already some 20 projects that rely on the vast natural resources and technological know-how of the group to which various member states are contributing, alongside a number of bilateral projects.

"Maybe in the very beginning the G-15 did not perform in the best way possible but recently," Moussa believes, "there has been an increasing feeling that, with the way the world economy is going, there is a need to maximise the usefulness of this group."

The first and last G-15 meetings were hosted by Malaysia. This eighth summit was originally scheduled to be hosted by Jamaica. When local considerations interfered with plans, Egypt offered to take over so that the opportunity of taking stock of the South Asian crisis and co-ordinating positions on pending economic issues was not lost. And Egypt remains willing to play host to the 10th summit in the year 2000, as originally scheduled.

Bilateral economic cooperation and the deadlock in Middle East peace-making topped the agenda of the Mubarak-Gore meeting which took place on the eve of the London talks. Nevine Khalil **reports on the political and economic outcome of the four-hour-long talks**

Talking politics and reform

On the eve of the London meetings between the United States, Israel and the Palestinians, US Vice-President Al Gore concluded a short tour of the region. Gore was in Cairo on Sunday after visiting Israel, the autonomous Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia.

For over four hours President Hosni Mubarak and Gore discussed the continuing stalemate in the peace process, and presided over the sixth meeting of the US-Egyptian Economic Partnership which began in 1994. In a joint news conference, both men hoped that the London meetings would be successful because the alternatives were bleak.

"If this meeting is not a success, it would greatly complicate things in the future," Mubarak said. Gore agreed, saying that the Palestinians and Israelis should seize this "strategic, extraordinary opportunity" for a breakthrough. Looking ahead, he added that there was "a long way to go" for the peace process, regardless of the outcome of the London meetings. "There are other tracks such as the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, but a successful outcome in London will provide a springboard for the whole process," Gore said.

After Gore's departure, Mubarak went into talks with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who stopped over in Cairo for consultations on his way to London. "We will wait for the Palestinians to say their word because they have to decide," Mubarak said ahead of meeting with Arafat. "They have to accept or refuse what is being proposed to them."

Gore was hounded by the Egyptian press and media about his visit to Israel to attend celebrations marking its 50th anniversary. He defended the visit, saying that "there is absolutely no inconsistency at all in feeling an historic friendship for Israel and feeling passionately that it is in the best interests of Israel and our other friends in the region to have a successful conclusion to the peace process."

Turning to bilateral relations, Gore praised Egypt's "dramatic success story" in reforming the economy and encouraging foreign investment. "Egypt is moving ahead rapidly with a whole series of common-sense reforms... implemented boldly [to pave] the way for new trade and investment from around the world," the vice-president said. He affirmed the importance of involving the private sectors of both countries in "talking about practical solutions to concrete business problems," announcing that a number of US business leaders will arrive in Egypt next October "to aggressively evaluate the new investment possibilities."

Mubarak and Gore witnessed the signing of one treaty and three memoranda of understanding (MoUs) regulating bilateral relations in law enforcement, small businesses, environment and education as part of the US-Egyptian Economic Partnership. The Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) establishes a framework for law enforcement cooperation between the two countries and will enhance bilateral cooperation on transnational organised crime, terrorism and narcotics.

Cooperation will include serving documents, executing requests for searches and seizures, transferring persons in custody for testimony or other purposes, taking testimony of witnesses in either country and providing documents and records. MLAT covers any criminal offence in the country in which assistance is requested. It is yet to be ratified by the Egyptian parliament and US Congress.



The peace process topped President Mubarak's agenda this week, taking a little time off to celebrate his birthday. On Sunday he met separately with Gore (left) and Arafat

The MoU of the Small Business Administration (SBA) formalises a cooperative relationship between the SBA and the Egyptian government to assist start-up companies in Egypt's developing private sector.

The environmental MoU establishes formal commitments for cooperation on environmental issues, including global climate change, implementation of Egypt's environment law and promotion of sustainable tourism. Environmental Affairs Minister Nadia Makram Ebeid said that a joint committee will be formed to detail the required projects and action plans, reports Mahmoud Bakr. It will also focus on the protection of water resources, reducing air pollution, solid waste management and the use of compressed natural gas as car fuel.

The US Trade Department and companies working in the field of environment will participate in an environment conference which Egypt will organise next year. The conference and accompanying exhibition will showcase the latest technologies used in environmental protection. A dialogue between the Egyptian and American private sectors will focus on "clean" technology, which limits environmental impacts and depends on new and renewable energy sources, according to Ebeid.

The education MoU establishes new programmes for the construction of community schools as well as an exchange programme for principals and teachers.

US-Egyptian partnership check

President Hosni Mubarak and US Vice-President Al Gore presided over the sixth meeting of the US-Egyptian Partnership for Economic Development and Growth last Sunday. The two men listened to progress reports by the Partnership's various bodies, including four governmental sub-committees and the private sector Presidents' Council. After the meeting, Egypt and the US announced a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), initiating government-to-government dialogue on trade and investment issues, which would pave the way for a Free Trade Agreement.

Clearly, the private sector is taking the lead in improving investment and trade relations between Egypt and the US. And the Presidents' Council, whose members include leading business people on both sides, has played a vital role in advising the two governments on ways of achieving that end. Since 1994, Egypt has carried out numerous economic and legislative reforms based on recommendations provided by the Council.

Shafiq Gabr, chairman of ARTOC and a Council member, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that both sides have a common agenda, namely promoting Egypt as a high-profile investment venue. "There are no differences between the Egyptian and American sides," Gabr noted. "We both want to achieve the same objective of more investment and exports." He added that many efforts have been made towards realising that goal, and "clearly, we are moving along the right path, because over the past year, there's been a rise in non-oil US investment in Egypt as a result of policy changes here."

Gabr explained that the Council's efforts have resulted in greater US and multi-national private sector investments in the country. "Companies have become multi-national and multi-dimensional," he said, "and investment in the age of globalisation no longer comes from a single state."

High on the Council's future agenda is promoting Egypt's "competitive" edge for information technology and software. "The Council believes that Egypt has great potential, like India and Ireland, for information technology," added Gabr.

Jack Tyman, chairman of the US side of the Council, said that TIFA is a "precursor which institutionalises a dialogue between the two governments," prior to discussions that will lead to a Free Trade Agreement. The same procedure was used by the US and Mexico before the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed.

Tyman described it as a "very good step" towards an FTA, adding that, in tandem with the government dialogue, the Council will hold symposia and conferences in the US with key people in the private and public sectors, government and legislative bodies to raise support for an FTA.

Ibrahim Kamel, chairman of the Egyptian side, said that both parties impressed on Gore that a US-Egypt FTA "is a very important point." Tyman agreed that studies have shown how an FTA would increase trade both ways, as well as technology sharing and joint investment. "The private sector is encouraging both governments to expedite this dialogue," Tyman said.

Last year, Congress rejected a "fast track policy", that would allow the administration to conclude FTAs with any country it chose. As a result, the possibility of finalising an agreement with Egypt has dimmed until the Congress-administration dispute is resolved. "Egypt is in the same situation as other countries," explained Tyman, who believes that TIFA and the corresponding private sector dialogue would prepare both sides for FTA discussions when the time comes.

Gamal Mubarak, spokesman for the Egyptian side, said that free trade has been high on the Council's agenda over the past two years, although it is "not an easy process for either side". "We hope that [TIFA] could eventually lead us along the road to a free trade agreement," Mubarak added.

Although Mubarak conceded that there has been a surge in US investment in such fields as power and telecommunications over the past few months, he said that Egypt's "aspirations" have not yet been met.

Kamel affirmed that there is progress on all fronts — direct investment and technology transfer — adding that "very soon" major companies in the fields of education and human resource development will initiate operations in Egypt.

During their discussions with the president and vice-president, the Council focused on the initiatives undertaken since the beginning of this year. President Mubarak stressed the government's determination to continue efforts to improve Egypt's business and investment climate and give the private sector the opportunity to realise these goals. Gore affirmed his government's support for Cairo's efforts to attract direct foreign investments, which will promote economic growth and technology transfer and increase Egyptian exports.

Tyman told reporters that, "guided by the priorities of the government of Egypt", the Council chose two industries which it will promote for direct US private sector investment. These are agro-industrial investment projects and hi-tech industries where policy changes are needed to encourage investors.

Contacts with leading US companies in the field of agro-industry are underway, and so are preparations to host presentations in the US to raise awareness of investment opportunities in the Egyptian agricultural and agro-industrial sectors. Certain leading US Council members from the hi-tech industry, including software development, are already proving instrumental in providing insight into ways of attracting investments to Egypt's hi-tech industry, and potentially also in directly contributing to investments in that sector.

In the insurance investment sector, Egypt is ready to amend existing legislation to usher in private expertise and managerial skills. To this end, the Council began preparations for round-table discussions with a group of 15 leading US insurance sector companies to announce reforms and direct investment opportunities once the new legislation is passed.

On investment promotion, the US Trade and Development Agency (TDA) has agreed to organise and sponsor an investor conference in the US towards the end of the year. The conference will highlight 50 specific privatisation and infrastructure investment opportunities which the TDA will pre-qualify. The conference will be funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). "We're really making some exciting advances in these areas," Tyman said.

The Mubarak Professional Development Initiative (MPDI) was previously launched for young Egyptian professionals, and an NGO is under formation to maintain this focus on human resource development and to ensure the continuity of the project. Also, the Council supports cooperation between the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Social Fund for Development (SFD), which resulted in an agreement between the two governments to provide Egypt with technical assistance in creating small business development centres in Egypt.

The Council supported the new Procurement Law currently being discussed by the Egyptian parliament, and committed itself to capitalising on improved economic conditions to increase investment opportunities, technology transfer, trade and human resource development.

On the governmental level, Subcommittee I, concerned with economic, trade, investment and foreign funding policies, reported that Egypt will carry out new reforms to further encourage investments, giving the lead to private sector initiatives. More structural and legislative reforms are still needed, however, especially improved patent rights protection to encourage US high-tech companies to set up shop in Egypt. On trade, both sides want continued dialogue on improving trade relations, export and import services at Egyptian ports, reducing custom duties and continued cooperation in training and technical assistance related to the implementation of WTO agreements.

Sub-committee II, working on technology, assists in improving the technological capabilities of the private sector, by focusing on industrial technological requirements, and encouraging joint scientific research. It reported that it will work on enhancing the dialogue on improving technological and scientific development in Egypt.

Sub-committee III, working on environment and sustained development issues, focused on three major projects, namely the reduction of lead pollution in the air, especially in the Greater Cairo area; developing environmental tourism projects on the Red Sea coast; and development and management of cultural sites and protection of national heritage. The sub-committee's future agenda includes: outlining a national strategy on the best use of energy sources, improving health services in rural areas and the implementation of Egypt's 1994 Environment Law.

Dealing with education and human resource development, Sub-committee IV reported that, in coordination with other subcommittees and the Presidents' Council, it has worked on improving the skills and technical abilities of Egyptian workers, in addition to the education of women and girls. The sub-committee also played a vital role in enhancing cooperation between the private sector and government bodies through training programmes.

Tipper star for Imbaba health centre

While Al Gore was having talks with President Mubarak, his wife Tipper visited a USAID-funded maternal and child health centre at Imbaba. **Mariz Tadros** *was there*

It was midday and the staff of El-Ommal (Workers) Maternal and Child Health Centre in Imbaba were scurrying around, trying to get everything ready. Mrs Tipper Gore was coming round at 2.45pm. The visit was to be an opportunity for Mrs Gore to see a USAID-funded project working in the area of child survival, maternal and child health and family planning.

A truck arrived and downloaded flower pots which were arranged at the entrance to the centre. The black-and-white paint on the pavement was still wet.

Inside, 1.30pm: Posters on breastfeeding, family planning and infant diarrhoea prevention were brought in and plastered onto the otherwise bare walls. Members of the advance team — dispatched from Washington prior to the couple's arrival to oversee preparations — passed for the umpteenth time through the rooms Mrs Gore was scheduled to see during her 45-minute visit, eyeing them from all four corners.

2pm: Health Minister Ismail Sallam arrived to check out one of the rooms to be visited by Mrs Gore. He sniffed the air, and asked in an agitated voice: "Who has been smoking here?" Looking round at one of the centre's workers, he lashed out: "How could you have let them smoke here? Open the windows!"

2.55pm: Having arrived a little late, Mrs Gore immediately conferred a "gold star" upon the centre — an award given to government clinics which meet rigorous service quality standards. She then visited the unit for homeless babies, where she asked about the prospects for foster parents for these babies. She also met with some of the mothers who have benefited from the clinic's programmes, which include family planning, reproductive health and child health services. Mrs Gore was shown various contraceptive devices available at the family planning unit. Then she sat down to talk with a group of mothers with children.

Reporters were told in advance that there would be no room for questions. Not that they would have been able to hear her answers anyway. She was seated next to a mother with a young girl who insisted on grabbing her parent's purse. When her attempts failed, she began screeching constantly. Mrs Gore removed her watch and showed it to the girl. This kept her quiet for a while. Mrs Gore seemed genuinely at ease as she tried to chat with the mothers about their health and the number of children they have. In between Mrs Gore's hailing of Egypt's immunisation programme and efforts to reduce maternal mortality rates, the little girl lost interest in the watch and started screaming again. A member of the USAID press staff hurried to the adjoining room to bring her a rattle.

Outside the centre, word had got around that Mrs Gore likes children. The outcome was a mass of Imbaba children spread out along the sidewalks, waiting to get a glimpse of her on her way out. Earlier in the day, hardly anyone in the neighbourhood knew of Mrs Gore's visit to the centre. Seeing the flower pots being brought in, one of the women mumbled: "The governor of Cairo must be visiting."

Madinet El-Ommal (Workers' City) was originally built by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser for textile workers. Now its residents are mostly pensioners, plus a sizeable proportion of civil servants. Although located in Imbaba, Madinet El-Ommal is lined with blocks of buildings on spacious paved streets. It is nothing like Western Mounira on the other side, which has long been synonymous with terrorism, poverty and shanty dwellings.

Most of the Madinet El-Ommal residents interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* said that the services provided by the Maternal and Child Health Centre were, on the whole, excellent, the best they have in the community. "Mind you," said one woman, "this is only recent, less than a year ago. Before that, nobody used to go there. It was a dump, and the services were really bad. At one point, they even closed it down." The clinic is one of 3,400 in Egypt which have received assistance from USAID.

Surprisingly, none of the people interviewed were aware that the centre is funded by USAID. The 73-year-old sheikh Khalaf Mohamed Abdallah of the nearby mosque saw nothing wrong in Egyptians accepting USAID because, as he argues, "after all this is our money. There are many Muslim immigrants who pay taxes with the sweat of their brows to the American government which, in turn, sends the crumbs to Egypt," he said.

Umm Hussein was surprised when she was informed that the centre was funded by USAID. A faint smile glimmered on her face. About 10 years ago, USAID had given her, as well as many other women she knew, a certificate of deposit equivalent to LE5 because she did not have many children (only three). "We also got good [cooking] oil and flour too. Hey, if it is funded by USAID, does that mean we will be getting flour and oil too?" she asked.

Verdi's *Aida* back to the Pyramids

The annual staging of Verdi's *Aida* will be shifted back from Luxor to the Giza Pyramids but, as **Rehab Saad** reports, the time remains unchanged — next October

The Hatshepsut Temple opposite Luxor will not host Verdi's *Aida* this year. It will move back from old Thebes to the foot of the Great Pyramids of Giza where the major part of the opera is set. A spectacular $2.75 million production, from 12 to 17 October, will coincide with the 10th anniversary of the new Cairo Opera House. "*Aida* has taken its time in Luxor, where we tried it three times: in 1987 near the Luxor temple on the eastern bank of the Nile and in 1994 and 1997 in front of the Hatshepsut Temple on the western bank," said Hassan Kami of the Cairo Opera House. "It is high time that *Aida* took off again back to the Pyramids where Verdi imagined it taking place."

Declaring that Luxor will not host *Aida* again, Kami said the Pyramids will be its final home.

According to Ilhami El-Zayyat, head of the Egyptian Travel Agencies Chamber, selling *Aida* in Cairo will be an easier job for travel agencies. "Although Luxor is a magnificent setting, *Aida* did not work out there. Cairo has a big foreign community and also many hotels and the Pyramids are more easily accessible than the Hatshepsut Temple," he said.

El-Zayyat pointed out that most travel agencies will market the event. "We do not care much about the revenue. What we do care about is that such an annual event should not stop. If *Aida* continues to be staged annually, I believe that we will benefit financially in the long run," he said.

Kami said that last year's Luxor production covered its expenses and also provided Egypt with free promotion before and after the performance.

"We have learned from past experience and now know how to make a big production with lower expenses," Kami said. "This year, we are planning to spend $2.75 million, about 30 per cent less than last year."

He said the revenue from last year's production amounted to $3.5 million.

Preparations for the October production are in full swing at the Opera House. Moreover about 10 public relations companies are promoting the event abroad. "There are also 26 ticket outlets in Europe. Travel agencies will have a big role as well as the Egyptian Tourism Authority which will promote it through its offices abroad," said Kami. There are already two sponsors for the event: EgyptAir and Accor Hotels, and four others will be contracted.

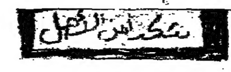
"The theatre will seat about 3,400 spectators," Kami said. "There are plans to increase this number next year."

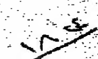
Opera singers Lucia Mazaria, Maria Guleghina and Leona Mitchell will play Aida and Vladimir Galouzine and Nicola Martinucci will play Radames, Aida's lover. Prices for the gala opening performance will range from $100 to $250 and those of the other performances will vary from $75 to $200.

In 1987 *Aida* was staged twice, both at the Pyramids and in Luxor. But the setting of this year's production will be slightly different from the 1987 production at the Pyramids. "This time *Aida* will be 500 metres away from any monument or building," said Kami. "It will be staged in the back area of the Pyramids which is vast and can be used for big productions. We are just using the Pyramids as background. In 1987, the theatre was built inside the sanctuary of the Sphinx. This can never happen again for we have to preserve our monuments."

According to Opera House officials, this year's production will not have a foreign director but an executive director only, who is Egyptian. "We are going to imitate last year's production," Kami said. "This will be done by Abdel-Moneim Kamel of the Opera House, who will have six assistants."

The orchestra will be Egyptian and the choir will include Egyptians and Italians.





Navigating a centrist course

The efforts of the would-be founders of the Wassat Party to win legality are gaining momentum and so is the controversy surrounding the difficult birth of this new middle-of-the-road Islamist-oriented political force. Amira Howeidy reports

The Political Parties Tribunal will decide on 9 May whether the Wassat (Centre) Party should be licensed as a legal political party. The would-be founders had filed an appeal with the tribunal a year ago after their original application for a licence was turned down by the Political Parties Committee.

Selim El-Awwa, lawyer for the would-be founders, appeared confident of victory. "Al-Wassat has become a reality and does not need a licence from anyone," El-Awwa told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The political and constitutional definition of a party is a group capable of political activity in a certain society. Al-Wassat has achieved that already; it is the only party that received excessive international attention, like no other party had received before. If we seek a licence, it is simply because this is the only way we can operate legally."

El-Awwa, himself one of the would-be founders, said that "from a legal perspective, we have a very strong case. It will be very difficult for the tribunal to reject our appeal, but we still cannot predict what will happen."

When Abul-Ela Madi, former secretary-general of the Engineers' Syndicate and a member of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, first approached the Political Parties Committee with a request for establishing the Wassat Party two years ago, observers viewed it as an act of mutiny within the 70-year-old Islamist organisation. But some critics, citing the fact that the would-be founders were mainly Brotherhood members plus a handful of Christians, argued that Madi's action was yet another attempt by the Brotherhood to gain legality.

However, two years after the event, neither scenario appears to be acceptable. The platform of the would-be founders was recently published in the form of a book by the prestigious Dar El-Shorouk publishing house, reflecting in some sections different priorities from the Brotherhood's. The platform asserts that the people are the source of authority, unlike the Brotherhood which places the emphasis on religion. And yet the platform attaches importance to implementing Article 2 of the Constitution which stipulates that "Islamic *Shari'a* is the main source of legislation." Last August, the founders, along with a group of Nasserists and secularists, announced the formation of a shareholder company to put out a new weekly newspaper named *Al-Mustaqbal* (The Future). Although this project was thwarted by the recent changes in the Companies' Law, the founders are searching for a legal way out.

"Al-Wassat is the best political endeavour in the entire Islamist movement," said journalist Salah Eissa of the leftist Tagammu Party. "The founders have shown great intelligence and maturity and the Wassat can become an active political party in a short period of time."

Some analysts believe that the government has softened its opposition to the group. Back in 1996, after Madi's request was turned down, he was arrested briefly along with a number of Brotherhood members "for belonging to an illegal group... and attempting to circumvent legality by establishing the Wassat Party as a front for the Muslim Brotherhood." But, in a sign that the government might be switching signals, Madi appeared in a preview of a new television show last Ramadan entitled "Face to Face." However, the talk show was never screened for unknown reasons. So, did the government really soften its opposition?

"Appearing in a preview on the state-run Television could signal a significant change in government policy toward Al-Wassat," said Diaa Rashwan, an expert on political Islam, and the managing editor of the *State of Religion in Egypt* report, issued by the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. "But I believe that the government is still extra cautious with them."

Following Madi's initial attempt to establish the party, the Brotherhood's leaders, angry that such a step was taken without their consent, pressured the majority of would-be members to withdraw their applications. Although the Brotherhood's action allayed fears that Wassat could be a front for the Brotherhood, Rashwan remained sceptical that the government would grant them legality.

"It is far-fetched that the government would place its bets on a group that originally branched from the Brotherhood, although the group actively interacted with other political forces and embraced political trends that are different from the Brotherhood's," Rashwan said. "If the Wassat is legalised, who will guarantee, for example, that [Brotherhood spokesman] Maamoun El-Hodeibi will not become a member and, eventually, the party's leader?"

Although the gap between the Wassat and the Brotherhood has widened during the past two years, Rashwan maintains that the former has not matured enough to be a political force that must be reckoned with.

Reflecting another fear, Rashwan said that if the Wassat gains legality, "many people who are familiar with the Brotherhood, particularly in the provinces, will automatically think that this is a Brotherhood party."

El-Awwa responded that such interpretations are "completely mistaken." "The Brotherhood is an ideological group while the Wassat is a political party with a political platform that can be implemented, reviewed, changed, developed and modified in line with political developments," he said.

"When Madi was arrested two years ago just because he wanted to establish a party, the government held the mistaken belief that the party is the Brotherhood," El-Awwa said. "I and many others explained to government officials that this is not true. I believe they understand now."

El-Awwa insists, however, that he is not concerned with whether officials believe the party's claims or not. "We have a strong appeal, showing that the Political Parties Committee made grave legal mistakes when it turned down our request," he said. From his viewpoint, it is a legal "impossibility" for the tribunal to reject the appeal. "But if this happens, we still have another way out," El-Awwa said, refusing to say just what that other way might be.

Interaction, past and future

With some 1,500 delegates attending, Cairo will be hosting next week a congress of the International Advertising Association. Rehab Saad reports on the final preparations

Hassan Hamdi

On 10 May, and for the following three days, the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC) will open its doors to delegates from all over the world, arriving to take part in the 36th Congress of the International Advertising Association (IAA). The delegates represent the world's largest marketing and advertising agencies, the press and media, producers of audio-visual material, publishing and printing houses and marketing managers of leading corporations.

Preparations are in full swing for the congress, which will be held under the patronage of President Hosni Mubarak. An operations room has been active for the past month to organise the registration of local and foreign delegates, accommodation, transport, the opening and closing ceremonies and other events of the congress. Preparations are almost complete: the list of speakers has been confirmed, plans for satellite conferencing have been finalised, hotel and tourist buses have been booked and arrangements have been made for pre- and post-congress tours.

"It is a big honour for Egypt," said Hassan Hamdi, chairman of the organising committee. "In fact, this is the first time the congress will be held in the Middle East and Africa. Due to its importance, many countries compete aggressively to host this congress."

With the world standing on the threshold of the third millennium, the principal theme of the congress will be "Interaction: the 21st century." Delegates and representatives of various information technology companies, such as Microsoft, Compaq and AT&T, will talk about the future of communications and interactive advertising and marketing. Experts will reveal the vast untapped potential of the Middle East and Africa, providing guidance on how to do business in the region.

"About 50 senior speakers are going to take part," Hamdi said. Ibrahim Nafie, Al-Ahram board chairman and editor-in-chief, will deliver the key-note speech at the congress. Also invited to speak on the future of media and marketing communications are Michael Elliott, editor of *Newsweek* magazine, Jim Lee, president of American Express Emerging Markets, Robert O'Leary, Corporate public affairs manager of Mobil, Jan Soderstrom, executive vice -president of Visa International and Paul Woolmington, president of World Wide Media.

For the first time in the IAA's history, the congress will include interactive sessions, where attendants will have the opportunity to interact via satellite and video-conferencing with others abroad. Using a computer server, the sessions' moderator, sitting in the Cheops Hall of the CICC, will connect delegates with on-line speakers abroad. All delegates will be able to follow the sessions through video screens and projectors. If they wish to interact with moderators and speakers, they will be able to use one of 120 computers installed in the conference hall.

Interaction sessions will consist of three parts: past, present and future. Interaction "past" will explore the mysterious interactions of ancient Egyptian culture — the first civilisation in which communication was documented. All the speakers will be renowned Egyptologists or historians, such as Dr Kent Weeks, who will speak from the Al-Ahram office in New York, Dr Christiane Ziegler, speaking from the Louvre in Paris, Dr Gaballah Ali Gaballah, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, speaking from the Egyptian Embassy in Vienna and Dr Zahi Hawwas, Director of the Giza Plateau, speaking from a boat cruising between Vancouver and Alaska.

Interaction "present" will gauge the consumer's role in the information age, and the advantages and disadvantages of being informed by so many different sources, and through so many hi-tech channels.

Interaction "future" will look into the future of communication technologies, and their impact on the coming generations.

"It is the first time ever in 60 years that the attendants will be able to interact with people from five different European countries on air, and be able to ask them questions and hear their answers," Hamdi said. "The satellite conferencing is sponsored by Arab Radio and Television (ART)," Hamdi added.

Another first is a business matchmaking programme, offering interested delegates the opportunity to meet with key government officials, and leading private sector entrepreneurs to probe business potential.

"I believe that the vast international media coverage of the congress will benefit Egypt a lot," Hamdi said. "The attendants will convey what they saw to their newspapers or TV stations. Moreover, the presence of about 1,500 foreign visitors will promote conference tourism to Egypt."

Hamdi added another important point: "The advertisement budgets allocated for the Middle East are small compared to those allocated for Europe, the USA and Japan. It is high time to show the world that we are not getting our fair share." He feels that the congress could serve as a platform for discussing the matter.

On the last day of the congress, and on the occasion of the IAA's 60th anniversary, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, Barry Day, Creative Director of the IAA and Norman Vale, the IAA's director-general, will launch a "give-a-kid-a-hand" campaign, which is designed to underline the world's responsibility towards children. The campaign will receive extensive coverage throughout the world.

On the sidelines of the congress, an exhibition displaying the latest achievements in the fields of information technology, telecommunications, multi-media and related industries will be held, as well as a bazaar displaying Khan El-Khalili handicrafts and Egyptian cotton casual wear.

The congress is organised by the Al-Ahram Establishment, Look Advertising, American Express Travel and Intermarkets. It is also sponsored by a number of major Egyptian and Arab media channels, advertising and tourism organisations. It has the support of the ministries of information, tourism, foreign affairs and transport and communications.

(See Profile, back page)

Waiting for the future

Six months after the Hatshepsut Temple massacre, the city of Luxor still struggles with the ramifications. Fatemah Farag talks to Maj. Gen. Selmi Selim about government plans for the future and does some independent scouting to tap popular feeling

"Honesty in dealing with the problem as well as objective criticism constitute 60 per cent of the solution," says Maj. Gen. Selmi Selim, head of the Higher Council for Luxor. Far from his home-town of Mansoura, Selim was sent down south in a major reshuffle of government officials following last November's slaughter. His mission is to revamp Luxor's image and make plans for the city's future.

"We have a vision for Luxor and a plan extending all the way to the year 2017. The idea is to turn the city into an open museum and a cultural preserve," Selim explained.

The three-pronged government plan focuses on promoting tourism, urban planning and diversification of employment opportunities. Regarding the first aspect, Selim points out that "to date Luxor has been known for cultural tourism only. This has meant that tourists spend only 20 minutes in the city itself. We ship people in and out to see this or that temple but there is nothing else to keep them here."



Plans are underway to restore the image of Luxor — photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

To address this shortcoming, the government is attempting to expand the definition of tourism. "We are presently approving projects which would promote health tourism. For example, the use of sand and our great weather by health spas," explained Selim, adding that 12 facilities of this sort had been approved at a total cost of LE850 million.

Moreover, a golf course project is underway over a 250-feddan area and another similar project has been approved. "We hope that the first course will be inaugurated in November with an international golf championship," said Selim.

A piece of land has been allocated for an entertainment complex and ideas for the promotion of water sports are being discussed. "Can you believe that in a place like Luxor we have only a few cinemas and no theatre?" Selim asked. "These are things which have to change, not only for tourism but also for the quality of the lives of the inhabitants themselves."

Selim denied reports that a shipping dock would be constructed along the western bank of the Nile, which is home to Luxor's archaeological treasures.

"There will be no building of docks on the west bank," said Selim pointedly. "However, we must develop docking facilities because we have 250 boats on the Nile and the result is that you have four or five rows of boats parked parallel to each other at any given time. It is becoming a security hazard and it doesn't look good either," he said. According to Selim, what is planned is a 4.5 km-long dock along the east bank. "We have plans for beautifying the west bank, but its nature will not be changed."

Other plans aim at relieving Luxor of its population overload. "The number of inhabitants has reached approximately 380,000. We need to get people away from the city," Selim said. To date, three housing projects have been approved — New Teeba [Thebes], El-Taref and New Luxor. The first is to absorb between 20,000 and 30,000 inhabitants and 70 per cent of the infrastructure is already in place.

El-Taref, west of the Nile, is intended as a solution for the age-old problem of Old Gurnah — a problem which escalated into violence recently when a confrontation between security forces and inhabitants left four residents dead. "We intend to move nine shanty areas known as Old Gurnah to this new town," said Selim. "The first phase of this project will be completed in two years and will absorb approximately 8,500 persons, while the final project should house 15,000."

New Luxor, which will cover an area of 3,000 feddans, is still in the planning stage.

Finally, the employment diversification focus: "We have wonderful artisans in our town, and yet 90 per cent of the items on display at the bazaars come from outside the city. It is our aim to provide young people with all the support they need to set up handicraft projects," Selim explained.

For the success of these government programmes, Selim stressed the importance of the people's cooperation. "We have a new security concept that is more sophisticated and there is a feeling of optimism on the streets," said Selim.

Asked if these programmes have been successful in reviving tourism, Selim insisted on seeing the glass as half-full. "After what happened, foreigners said, 'Forget it, Luxor has another two years to go before it picks up.' However, next month we are getting two weekly charter flights from England and occupancy in hotels is up, not to mention conference tourism. We are doing quite well, in fact," he concluded with a broad smile.

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Walking around Luxor can be both pleasant and nerve-wracking. The streets are empty and only a handful of tourists are out, giving you the impression that you have the entire place for yourself. On the other hand, shop-owners, carriage-and-taxi drivers as well as the boatmen are all desperate for work and have very little to target — other than yourself. As Selim Ragab, a taxi-driver put it: "These have been very hard times. Right after the incident [massacre], we had no work at all. Today it is a bit better. I mean here you are in the car and I will make some money."

According to government statistics, hotel occupancy is up to 30 per cent, a figure supported by a policy of promoting conference tourism. "We have had people from the Rotary Club, Arab Parliamentary Union and Arab Labour Organisation and they all held conferences in Luxor," said Sabri, who owns a bazaar in the main market area. "Things could have been worse."

However, vendors complain that the majority of visitors are Egyptian and thus are less inclined to buy what Luxor has to offer. "Why would an Egyptian want to buy souvenirs of Egypt?" asked Sabri. "Besides, they usually bargain over prices."

Even though the whole town has been hard hit, some have suffered more than others. As Khaled Fathi, a tourist guide, explained over tea at his home in New Gurnah: "What is really sad is that the people who were hit the hardest are the drivers, tour guides and day vendors — people who cannot turn to other jobs when tourism isn't flourishing."

Although the government's efforts to revive tourism seem to be appreciated by most citizens, the same does not apply to all the new urban development plans. In the village of New Gurnah, Halawiyat is busy baking bread, while the men in her family are out trying to make money for next week's flour. "Our whole village works in tourism. Many of them are taxi-drivers. They go out every morning and park their cars at the taxi stop, only to come back at the end of the day without much in their pockets." She shakes her head sadly but suddenly becomes very excited with the mention of new cities. "We live off the archaeological sites and we protect them. If it was not for our sons, nobody would have done anything at the time of the massacre. We were unarmed like the police, but we displayed greater courage when it came to protecting the tourists. How can they then move our people out in the desert?" she asked heatedly.

Those who have already moved to El-Taref are not very pleased either. "We have no water or facilities," said *Aam* Ali as his son filled up a jug from a water truck which comes once a day. "The houses are very small and there is no place for our livestock." Built on a hilltop and known as the "flood victims' homes," the small, domed structures look like toys. "They think things will be more secure when we are out in the desert?" he asked. "Well it wasn't our fault to start with."

People see themselves as caught in the grip of a monkey wrench. "We are poor and getting poorer; it is true that we are getting better treatment from the police but still .... And then there are the terrorists. What can we do?" said Abdel-Fattah, a limestone craftsman whose work has come to a virtual standstill. As he pulled nervously on the neckline of his *galabiya*, Abdel-Fattah said: "We have been reduced to nothing. When I was young, we used to jump from the top of a palm-tree just for fun. Today, if a man falls off his donkey, he is broken into a hundred pieces."

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? People are not sure. "We in Luxor are very unfortunate," concluded Khaled. "If it is not one thing, then it is another. There was the massacre and then the Gurnah fighting and then a shooting in Minya ... One thing after another. What do you expect?"

Afghanistan 'returnees' sentenced

The Supreme State Security Court has sentenced two Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya militants to death, sent 15 to jail and acquitted six others. Mona El-Nahhas reports

Two top figures of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya were sentenced to death on Monday, one of them *in absentia*, by the Supreme State Security Court for plotting attacks against high-government officials. In a session that lasted just a few minutes, presiding Judge Ahmed Salaheddin Baddour also sentenced three militants to life imprisonment with hard labour, six to 15 years in prison, three to 10 years, one to five years, one to three years and one to one year. Six defendants were acquitted.

On 3 April, the court referred the dossiers of Mustafa Hamza, the Gama'a's military commander who is believed to reside in Afghanistan, and Said Abdel-Hakim to the Grand Mufti of the Republic. The Mufti's approval is a technicality, required under Egyptian law before anyone is sentenced to death. On Monday, Baddour said the court had gained the mufti's approval.

Reactions to the verdicts were mixed. The defendants' lawyer, Saad Hasaballah, said they were "tough and harsh." The defendants, who believe they are fighting for a holy cause, cheered while the relatives of those convicted broke down in tears. Relatives of the six who were acquitted rejoiced.

The defendants were accused of joining an illegal group that seeks to overthrow the government and establish a strict Islamic state. They were said to have received para-military training in Afghanistan and Sudan in preparation for carrying out terrorist attacks in Egypt. They were also accused of killing, or the attempt to kill, tourists, policemen and government officials. Most were arrested in late 1995 and were held in detention until their trial opened last year.

The death sentence against Hamza was the third he has received *in absentia*. He was previously sentenced to death by a military court in Alexandria in December 1992 and by a Cairo military tribunal in November 1993. Hamza is believed to have been involved in the 1995 assassination attempt on President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa.

Abdel-Hakim, standing in an iron cage along with the other defendants, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that, even though he belonged to Al-Gama'a, he was innocent. "I never did anything that deserves a death sentence," he said.

But, he added, "I am not afraid because my confidence in God's justice is unlimited. I am sure that God will help us sooner or later." Abdel-Hakim insisted that he had chosen the right path and had no regrets.

Mohamed Abdel-Fattah Radwan, who got life imprisonment with hard labour, said that he had hoped for a death sentence. "But I'm happy with the verdict. I'm not worried about my two children because I left them in God's hands."

Judge Baddour, who is known for giving harsh sentences against militants, is believed to be on the top of Al-Gama'a's most wanted list. The sentences were passed under tight security measures. Journalists and media personnel were thoroughly searched before they entered the courtroom.

Before Baddour entered, the defendants raised banners declaring support for their leaders in Egypt and abroad. Some brandished copies of the Qur'an while others shouted anti-government slogans.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

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The dove that wouldn't fly

Once again the neo-Zionists were able to capture the high ground, writes **Graham Usher**, as left-wing opposition fell flat at Israel's real 50th anniversary party — at Har Homa

Sitting in his small study at Haifa University — perched on the very summit of the Mount Carmel mountain range that dominates Haifa port and the Lower Galilee — Israeli historian, Ilan Pappe, ruminates on where Israel is at, 50 years on.

"I don't think we have Zionists in Israel any more," he says. "What we have are neo-Zionists and post-Zionists, or rather Zionists who have yet to understand that the founding myths of Zionism are no longer functional". These potential post-Zionists include political forces like Israel's leftist Meretz bloc and Pappe's own party, the non-Zionist and mainly Arab Democratic Front for Peace and Equality. The neo-Zionists are settler and other nationalist-religious groups who have gone back to Zionism and extracted from it the "most extreme, most fanatical" essence.

"The neo-Zionists are Israel's new right," says Pappe. "For them values like democracy and liberalism are utterly dispensable. The only value that counts is the Jewish nation. If preserving this nation means another war with the Arabs, so be it. If it means occupying more Arab land, so be it. This is the ideology that assassinated Rabin — it knows no inhabitants".

Pappe's taxonomy was illustrated on 30 April, Israel's Independence Day. While most Israelis were preoccupied with the shenanigans surrounding the "Jubilee Bells" celebration in Jerusalem — where a modern dance troupe pulled out of the ceremony after Jewish orthodox groups insisted that it perform "fully clothed" — Palestinians observed a festival at Jebel Abu Ghneim in the "closed" and occupied West Bank.

To commemorate Israel's 50th anniversary, Jewish settler and other rightist groups had called on their followers to gather there to "lay a symbolic cornerstone" at the site of the new Har Homa Jewish settlement. And gather they did. From morning to dusk, thousands streamed through what remains of the hill's pine forest and walked along the new dirt roads that now ring the mountain. Families laid out picnics and a children's playground amid the ruins of an ancient Arab fort on the crest of the hill. On a makeshift dais, "Jewish nationalist" rock music blared out while men and women danced themselves into a religious fervour. Right-wing leaders, like the Gesher Party's Michael Kleiner, gave speeches calling on Binyamin Netanyahu to "liberate us from the Oslo agreement". (Three days later Kleiner's Land of Israel Front warned that it would "topple" the Israeli government if Netanyahu considered a further West Bank redeployment of "more than 10 per cent").

Most of the estimated 10,000 who attended the festival were wearing black Kippurs and, for the women, medium length dresses, the emblem of Israel's pro-settler National Religious Party (NRP). But there was a considerable number in jeans and Nike T-shirts, draped in the blue and gold colours of the Likud Party's Betar youth movement. Whatever their affiliation, all were there to assert the sovereignty of Greater Israel over the West Bank and effect, symbolically for now but in the future actually, the demographic and territorial transformation of Jebel Abu Ghneim into Har Homa. They were — in Pappe's parlance — the human embodiment of "neo-Zionism".

Those he hopes will become Israel's "post-Zionists" were assembled at the foot of the hill. Around 300 Meretz and Peace Now supporters were staging a "counter-demonstration" to protest the settlers' takeover of Jebel Abu Ghneim. To make up for their small numbers, the protesters tried to inflate a massive white dove. But it stubbornly refused to leave the ground. They then lined the road leading to the mountain, picketing each settler who passed. One woman in a headscarf and pushing a pram raised her eyebrows in contempt. "Why do you listen to them?" she asked, referring to Peace Now. "They are a minority". Given that those on the hill out-numbered those at its foot by around 15 to one, the question needed an answer.

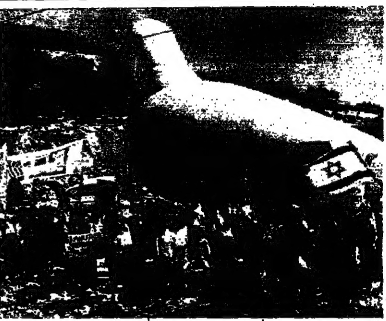
Why was the turn-out of Israel's Peace Camp at Jebel Abu Ghneim so derisory? No one with any sense of proportion can dispute that groups like Peace Now are committed to peace and are against settlements like Har Homa. But a clue to the left's current crisis in Israel was given on the placards Israel's Peace supporters brought with them to Jebel Abu Ghneim. Amid the usual slogans that "Har Homa = the end of peace" and "Bibi is bad for everyone", one banner stood out. "Har Homa is not Zionism," it read. For the Palestinians who lost their lands 50 years ago — and who live under Israeli occupation today — Har Homa has always been Zionism. And, for Israelis like Ilan Pappe, Har Homa is Zionism now.

"The Zionism left in Israel wants to square the circle," he says. "It says it wants Israel to be a democratic state, but denies that it can be a state for all its citizens. It says that Jews — who do not live here — can be equal citizens of Israel, but Palestinians — who live or did live here — cannot. It pretends that Zionism has somehow had nothing to do with the oppression of Palestinians. These are impossible contradictions".

Until they are resolved, suggests Pappe, the left is likely to stay marginal in Israeli society. Once they are resolved — which will probably be "after further violent upheavals" in the region — the left may not only be for peace but ready for it on the basis of a post-Zionist ideology. But this is for the long term. In the short term, the left will continue pumping up a dove that refuses to fly. And the right will have the mountain.







Three different, and equally symbolic occasions, last week in Israel (clockwise from left): at the official celebrations, dancers held aloft the emblems of the country's three *(sic)* religions in front of an appropriately fake *papier mâché* backdrop; in a somewhat more realistic scene, Israeli police clash with Israeli and Palestinian labour protesters demonstrating against the closure of the Palestinian territories; meanwhile, Peace Now activists at Har Homa try to launch a huge inflatable dove to protest at continuing settlement — but, keeping its own counsel, the dove resolutely refused to fly *(photos: AFP)*

Explosive Amman

A series of carefully-planned and targeted bomb attacks in and around the Jordanian capital would seem to have been mounted in protest at King Hussein's policy towards Israel. *Al-Ahram Weekly's* special corespondent in Amman reports

Last week was an explosive one in Amman. It culminated when an Israeli car with Jordanian licence plates was set ablaze outside the five-star Jerusalem Hotel, damaging six other adjacent vehicles. It is common practice for Jordanian licence plates to be issued to Israeli cars the minute they cross over into Jordanian territory for security reasons, following a number of attacks on Israeli tourists three years ago.

But the Jerusalem Hotel explosion carries a special significance since it targeted an Israeli Druze businessman, Azzam Al-Assadi, who was in the hotel. Roey Gilaad, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Amman, was also in the same hotel, and his car with its Jordanian licence plates was parked nearby.

Many analysts believe that this explosion was meant to send a message to the government of Abdel-Salam Majali. The Jordanian government refused an earlier request submitted by the Jordanian political parties to hold a rally to commemorate 50 years of Palestinian dispossession while the Israeli embassy was seen to be celebrating its Jubilee on a grand scale. Popular frustration against Prime Minister Majali's repressive measures has been expressed in a series of events ranging from last month's riots to this month's small home-made bombs targeting symbols and representatives of the political regime.

The Jerusalem Hotel bomb follows on from a series of explosions that have created widespread panic among the 1.5 million inhabitants of Amman, shattering their provincial tranquillity.

In Amman, it is widely believed that all these explosions are political in intention, since their "modus operandi" has been designed to avoid any loss of life, and their timing carefully chosen for the chilly hours of early morning when no passers-by are likely to be injured. Yet, despite such "reassuring" considerations, the panic is still mounting.

The sequence of attacks started on 21 April when a police high-way patrol command station 15 miles from Amman had five of its cars blown to pieces at 3.30 a.m. The explosion caused $70,000-worth of material damage, but nobody was hurt.

Just a week later, another explosion hit the car of Jordan's former Intelligence Chief Mohamed Rasoul Keilani, in the early hours of Wednesday 29 April. The same day another explosive device was set off aimed at Senator Jawdat Suboul, a former minister of the interior.

There is speculation that the Syrian-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (General Command), headed by Ahmad Jibril, might be behind the explosions, since several of its members were arrested six weeks ago on the Syrian border as they tried to infiltrate Jordan, carrying explosives. Those arrested later said their aim was to attack Israel.

Around twenty people were arrested from the Palestinian refugee camps, all of whom are suspected of affiliations with Jibril's PFLP-General Command.

Two Jordanian parliamentary deputies, Mahmoud Kharabsheh and Mohamed Azaydeh, issued statements asking for the release of Mohamed Abu Najich, Nasser Sarisi and Awni Shatarat, who are major figures of the political opposition in the refugee camps.

Since the Israeli attempt on Hamas leader, Khalid Misha'al, on 25 September last year, and the wounding of two Israeli diplomats three days earlier, Amman has become another Beirut, with other people's political scores being settled on Jordanian terrain.

There were attempted fire-bombings at the Israeli and British embassies last month and an explosion at an American School. Six Iraqi businessmen including a diplomat were massacred on 15 January and two prominent Jordanians, a top lawyer, Dr Hanna Neddeh and a top psychiatrist, Dr Awni Saad, were assassinated on 8 April. Dr Youssef Qussous, an army general who is head of the military medical services, had his house sprayed with bullets on 25 April. So far, none of these cases have been solved.

The finger of suspicion has also pointed at Syria. Sour relations between Amman and Damascus had earlier resurfaced with the press and television of the two countries aiming barbed comments at each other. Tension between the two Arab neighbours has been escalating since Jordan signed the October 1994 peace treaty with Israel, without honouring its earlier commitments to maintain unified coordination for a joint policy. However, events were never expected to reach the present pitch of violence. Current Syrian feelings became evident, however, when Damascus described the visit of the US Defence Secretary William Cohen along with the Turkish Vice Chief of Staff General Chafiq to Amman as stabbing Syria in the back. Syria also believed that this act was aimed at forcing it to acquiesce in the Israeli offer of a unilateral peace treaty with Lebanon.

Cool reception in Cairo

A small number of Egyptians turned up at an Israeli Embassy reception celebrating Israel's 50th anniversary, but high-level officials and the founders of the Cairo Peace Movement were conspicuously absent. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

Unlike the ceremonies held in various capitals across the world which were attended by heads of state and prime ministers, the Israeli Embassy in Egypt's 50th anniversary celebration was a low-key affair. Apart from Youssef Wali, deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture, most high-level government officials failed to show up for the festivities. Even the founders of the Cairo Peace Movement, a newly-established NGO dedicated to promoting regional peace, were absent.

Coming at a time when peace-making remains deadlocked, as a result of Binyamin Netanyahu's intransigent policies, a smaller-than-usual number of Egyptians attended, compared to the annual receptions organised by the embassy in previous years, said one Egyptian journalist who did go.

An Israeli embassy official claimed that "a lot of Egyptians" showed up at the reception, but the journalist dismissed this as "an exaggeration."

The Egyptians were outnumbered by foreign guests, the journalist said.

"There was nothing special about this year's festivities except for the fact that brooches, in the form of the blue-and-white Star of David flag, carrying Hebrew and English 50th anniversary inscriptions, were handed out to men while flowers were given to women," the journalist reported.

The festivities were overshadowed by the stagnation in the peace process, which dominated conversations at the reception, the journalist added.

To the dismay of Israeli officials, none of the founders of the Cairo Peace Movement, a think tank for the Egyptian chapter of the Copenhagen Declaration, showed up at the reception. "I wonder, if they really want peace, why they couldn't attend the reception?" asked an Israeli embassy official.

Salah Bassiouni, the movement's chairman and a former ambassador to Moscow, said he attended, but only in a personal capacity.

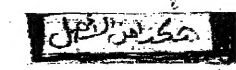
Abdel-Moneim Said, one of the peace movement's founders, said he turned down an invitation because "I cannot celebrate the establishment of the state of Israel."

Another member of the group, speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly* on condition of anonymity, said he and his peers did not go to the reception "because we are against the Israeli government and its policies. Therefore it was only natural for us to boycott an event at the Israeli embassy, let alone a celebration of Israel's 50th anniversary."

One observer told the *Weekly* that most Arabs "are offended by the event and do not understand why the world is rejoicing for the creation of a state that was founded on lands stolen from the Palestinians and that sowed the seeds of hostility in the region."

The observer said that Egypt and the Arab world are gripped by "sadness and despair as we see world leaders commemorate the establishment of a state at the expense of Arab territory and blood."

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**



Testing African democracy

Kofi Annan kicks off his African tour with a call for participatory democracy. But what about Nigeria's military rulers? asks Gamal Nkrumah

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan preached the gospel of participatory democracy during his current African tour, but warned that it must be coupled with a national, as opposed to tribal or ethnically-centred, outlook.

Annan kicked off his 12-day tour last Friday with a three-day visit to the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa where he attended a conference on African women and economic development. Closing the conference, he stressed that participatory democracy is key to Africa's political stability, social development and economic prosperity.

The violent politicisation of ethnicity in Africa has accounted for over half of all war-related deaths worldwide and resulted in over eight million Africans becoming refugees and displaced people. Of the 32 UN peacekeeping operations launched since 1989, 13 have been in Africa — more than any other region of the world.

Against this background, Annan reviewed four types of action to prevent or reduce conflict in Africa — peace-making, peace-keeping, humanitarian assistance and post-conflict peace-building — and proposed ways to make them more effective. Needless to say, none of these action plans can be expected to get off the ground without American approval, supervision and financial backing. The United States is heavily involved in bolstering civic participation and the democratic process in Africa. But it is not clear what impact American-style civic involvement will have on the African democratic process. What is clear is that Annan feels that the UN must work in tandem with the US in Africa.

Annan is scheduled to visit eight countries on his African tour, due to end on 10 May — Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

Annan has been pleading, so far in vain, that a restriction of arms sales to conflict zones must be internationally enforced. In Addis Ababa he urged African governments to enforce a zero-growth policy for defence budgets for a period of 10 years and a reduction of arms spending to below 1.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). But regional superpower Nigeria has been expanding its arms purchases as it has taken on the role of regional policeman. A military offensive by Nigerian troops from the West African peace-keeping force ECOMOG restored Sierra Leone's elected President Ahmed Tijan Kabbah. Nigerian military intervention in Sierra Leone was undertaken with full British and American approval, and reportedly with backdoor funding in breach of a UN resolution banning arms sales to Sierra Leone.

Early-warning mechanisms to signal impending conflicts are of no use without early action, the secretary-general has long insisted. In Addis Ababa, Annan proposed working closely with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The UN has established an Executive Committee on Peace and Security convened by the undersecretary-general for political affairs, and has recently set up a UN liaison office at the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa. But it's crystal clear that the Washington-initiated African Crisis Response Initiative, with $35 million allocated by the US Congress, is the cornerstone of Africa's new security arrangements.

After 40 years of technical assistance programmes, 90 per cent of the $12 billion in annual international aid received by the continent is spent on non-African consultants, despite the availability of African consultants in many fields.

The US philanthropy business is as large as the economy of China. US charitable organisations claim to deliver goods and services worth $700 billion — 10 per cent of America's GDP — to needy Americans. War-shattered Europe was rescued by the Marshall Plan. Can Africa manage without its own Marshall Plan?

In Addis Ababa, Annan urged donors to make sure that at least 50 per cent of their aid to Africa is spent in Africa. He also urged industrialised nations to eliminate trade barriers to African products. But the ascendancy of right-wing ideology in most Western countries bodes ill for Africa. America owes the UN $1.5 billion in arrears. Since taking office, Annan has halved the UN staff, implemented a "zero-growth" budget and cut down administrative costs to appease US-led critics of the bloated UN bureaucracy.

Annan urged the international community to step up its interest in Africa's economic and social development. He commended processes like the Tokyo International Conference on African Development; the UN New Agenda for the Development of Africa and its implementing component, the UN System-wide Special Initiative on Africa; and Commitment 7 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development.

Annan cautioned against using economic sanctions as an instrument to bring African military dictators to heel. "Economic sanctions especially are too often a blunt instrument imposing severe hardships on the civilian population and little on the protagonists," he warned. Instead Annan suggested that sanctions be targeted at decision-makers and their families, including the freezing of assets and restrictions on travel.

A test case for Annan's plans is Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation. Nigeria, which isn't on Annan's itinerary, has been embroiled in civil strife as civilian democracy activists do battle with the military authorities. Last week, Nigerian President General Sani Abacha was nominated as the only presidential candidate by all five of Nigeria's military regime-sanctioned political parties ahead of the August presidential elections. Civilian opponents of the military regime say that Abacha, who seized power in 1993, manipulated the nomination process to eliminate all competition for the presidential post.

Meanwhile, former deputy president General Oladipyo Diya and five other senior officials were convicted and sentenced to death last week for plotting to overthrow General Abacha. General Diya is an ethnic Yoruba, like Chief Moshood Abiola, the apparent winner of the 1993 elections who was imprisoned after declaring himself president when Abacha cancelled the polls. The Yoruba, Nigeria's second largest ethnic group, inhabit the south-western part of the country and have been spearheading opposition to General Abacha. Lagos, Ibadan and several other of Nigeria's most important cities are situated in Yorubaland, Nigeria's most important agricultural region producing virtually all of the country's cocoa, coffee and other cash crops.

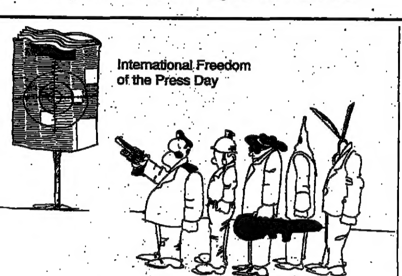
The court proceedings have been criticised by both foreign and Nigerian human rights activists. "This whole thing is a set up," Diya told the court — his hands and feet in chains. Human rights groups pleaded with Nigeria's leadership to open the trial to public scrutiny. Hundreds of people have been under investigation in connection with the case.

Reporters were permitted to attend the first day of the trial proceedings, but were barred from over two months of testimony. The defendants do not have the right to appeal. The military junta's Provisional Ruling Council has yet to ratify the tribunal's rulings. Rioting in Yorubaland has intensified with seven people reported killed by police last week in the Yoruba metropolis of Ibadan.

But the Nigerian military, which draws it's support from the Muslim north of the country, has so far relied on its vast oil revenues to strengthen its power base and bolster the country's defence capabilities. Last year, Nigeria reaped $10 billion in oil revenues. In spite of vociferous criticism, Western businessmen have been clamouring to do business with Nigeria. American businessmen to date have invested a staggering $7 billion in the Nigerian economy, while Britain wants to restore the lucrative British Airways link to Lagos, Nigeria's largest city and commercial capital.

Nigeria's economic problems are set to deepen as oil prices drop well below the $17 a barrel on which Nigeria's 1998 budget was based. Meanwhile, Nigeria's arrears on its $34 billion external debt continue to soar.

Unless Annan addresses the Nigerian crisis in particular as well as the problems of the continent in general, his plans for African political and economic regeneration might well turn out to be meaningless.





FATHI



Post-apartheid arms export boom

The end of apartheid has worked wonders for South Africa's arms exports, writes Mohamed Sabrin from Johannesburg

Dr Seshi Chonco

South Africans have yet to decide how much they are prepared to invest in the retention of an indigenous defence industrial capacity. They also have to decide whether they want to depend on foreign defence suppliers. On the one hand, it seems that the South African government has not only decided to retain the industry, but is encouraging South Africa's arms manufacturers to seek markets abroad. On the other hand, there are those who say that South Africa cannot afford to retain an industry that is as capital intensive as the defence industry, without significantly increasing its international sales from the present level of around $250 million per annum.

Nevertheless, these arms exports represent significant hard currency earnings, and provide both skilled and unskilled jobs (about 60,000), while reducing unit costs for weapons designated for the South African National Defence Forces (SANDF). It would also appear that there is considerable potential for South Africa to increase its market share, presently estimated at less than 0.5 per cent of the international market. A decision to forego potentially lucrative contracts would further reduce the poor returns on the South African defence industrial investment, which is estimated to be in excess of 4 billion rands or $1.5 billion.

South Africa has the only industrial defense capacity of significance in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also the only country in the region with a defence budget of international significance, apart from Nigeria. "The South African defence industry, therefore, is potentially either a regional asset or a liability," Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director of the Institute for Defence policy, says. "But the final verdict will depend on the successful consolidation of South Africa's transition to democracy, and its conduct in the region and internationally," Cilliers adds.

Shrouded in secrecy, the arms trade today is probably one of the most closely controlled aspects of international commerce. The primary goal of South Africa's new armaments policy is to ensure that there are sufficient controls at administrative and political levels, and to secure a clear understanding of the restraints governing arms dealing. Prof. Kader Asmal, chairman of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), has stated that: "Restraint must indeed be the watchword in the new South Africa's arms dealings with the world".

The Denel Group, which exports a wide range of manufacturing products, is also South Africa's largest arms exporter. Denel was established as a separate company in 1992 when it split from Armscor, the state-owned armaments procurement company. Among Denel's better-known products are the Rooivalk Attack helicopters, the G5 155mm towed gun-howitzer and the self-propelled G6 155mm gun-howitzer.

Today, Denel's arms exports account for 30 per cent of turnover compared with just 17 per cent in the early 1990s, and this in the face of declining world demand for armaments and a global decline in military spending. Denel has achieved several notable successes in the past two years. Among them was a commitment from the Malaysian Air Force, during a tour of South-east Asia by South African President Nelson Mandela in early 1997, to acquire eight Rooivalk Attack helicopters. Algeria, Greece, Australia and Saudi Arabia have also expressed interest in the helicopter, while several African and Asian countries have shown interest in the G6.

"There is a growing market in the Middle East, and we are keen to ensure that our relations with Arab countries grow," Dr Seshi Chonco, Denel's managing director, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Denel has three resident representatives in the Arab world and supports defence exhibitions hosted by Arab countries.



Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations were in full swing last Thursday, the day when, according to the Jewish calendar, the state of Israel was established. The celebrations, held in major Western capitals, were attended by leading public figures and heads of state. Hollywood joined in the jamboree with a special programme hosted by Michael Douglas and Kevin Costner, featuring luminaries such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Kathy Bates, Winona Ryder and President Clinton, all of whom paid tribute to Israel's greatness. Common to all the celebrations, as **Edward Said** notes, was the attempt to project the old-fashioned image of Israel as a haven of enlightened liberalism in a sea of Arab fanaticism and to obliterate the fact that half a century has gone by without Israeli restitution or acknowledgement of Palestinian human rights and without connecting the abnegation of those rights to *Israel's official policies*

Fifty years of dispossession

In the United States, celebrations of Israel's fifty years as a state have tried to project an image of the country that went out of fashion since the Palestinian Intifada (1987-92): a pioneering state, full of hope and promise for the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, a haven of enlightened liberalism in a sea of Arab fanaticism and reaction. On 15 April, for instance, CBS broadcast a two hour prime-time program from Hollywood hosted by Michael Douglas and Kevin Costner, featuring movie stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Kathy Bates (who recited passages from Golda Meir minus, of course, her most celebrated remark that there were no Palestinians) and Winona Ryder. None of these luminaries are particularly known for their Middle Eastern expertise or enthusiasm, although all of them in one way or another praised Israel's greatness and enduring achievements. There was even time for a cameo appearance by President Bill Clinton, who provided perhaps the least edifying, most atavistic note of the evening by complimenting Israel, "a small oasis," for "making a once barren desert bloom," and for " building a thriving democracy in hostile terrain."

Ironically enough, no such encomia were intoned on Israeli television, which has been broadcasting a 22-part series, *Tkuma*, on the country's history. This series has a decidedly more complicated content. Episodes on the 1948 War, for instance, made use of archival sources unearthed by the new historians (Benny Morris, Ilan Pappe, Avi Schlaim, Tom Segev, et al) to demonstrate that the indigenous Palestinians were forcibly expelled, their villages destroyed, their land taken, their society eradicated. It was as if Israeli audiences had no need of all the palliatives provided for diasporic and international viewers, who still needed to be told that Israel was a cause for uncomplicated rejoicing and not, as it has been for Palestinians, the cause of a protracted, and still continuing dispossession of the country's indigenous people.

That the American celebration simply omitted any mention of the Palestinians indicated also how remorselessly an ideological mind-set can hold on, despite the facts, despite years of news and headlines, despite an extraordinary, if ultimately unsuccessful, effort to keep effacing Palestinians from the picture of Israel's untroubled sublimity. If they're not mentioned, therefore they don't exist. Even after fifty years of living the Palestinian exile I still find myself astonished at the lengths to which official Israel and its supporters will go to suppress the fact that a half century has gone by without Israeli restitution, recognition, or acknowledgment of Palestinian human rights and without, as the facts undoubtedly show, connecting that suspension of rights to Israel's official policies. Even when there is a vague buried awareness of the facts, as is the case with a front page *New York Times* story on April 23 by one Ethan Bronner, the Palestinian *Nakba* is characterized as a semi-fictional event (dutiful inverted commas around the word "catastrophe" for instance) caused by no one in particular. When Bronner quotes an uprooted Palestinian who describes his miseries, the man's testimony is qualified by "for most Israelis, the idea of Mr Shikaki staking claim to victimhood is chilling," a reaction made plausible as Bronner blithely leapfrogs over the man's uprooting and systematic deprivations and immediately tells us how his "rage" (for years the approved word for dealing with Palestinian history) has impelled his sons into joining Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Ergo, Palestinians are violent terrorists, whereas Israel can go on being a "vibrant and democratic regional superpower established on the ashes of Nazi genocide." But not on the ashes of Palestine, an obliteration that lingers on in measures taken by Israel to block Palestinian rights, domestically as well as in territories occupied in 1967.

Take land and citizenship for instance. Approximately 750,000 Palestinians were expelled in 1948: they are now more than 4 million. Left behind were 120,000 (now one million) who subsequently became Israelis, a minority constituting about 18 per cent of the state's population, but not fully-fledged citizens in anything more than name. In addition there are now some 2.5 million Palestinians without sovereignty on the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is the only state in the world which is not the state of its actual citizens, but of the whole Jewish people who consequently have rights that non-Jews do not. Without a constitution, Israel is governed by Basic Laws of which one in particular, the Law of Return, makes it possible for any Jew anywhere to emigrate to Israel and become a citizen, at the same time that native-born Palestinians do not have the same right. 93 per cent of the land of the state is characterised as Jewish land, meaning that no non-Jew is allowed to lease, sell or buy it. Before 1948, the Jewish community in Palestine owned a little over 6 per cent of the land. A recent case in which a Palestinian Israeli, Adel Kaadan, wished to buy land but was refused because he was a non-Jew has become something of a *cause célèbre* in Israel, and has even made it to the Supreme Court which is supposed to but would prefer not to rule on it. Kaadan's lawyer has said that "as a Jew in Israel, I think that if a Jew somewhere else in the world was prohibited from buying state land, public land, owned by the federal government, because they're Jews, I believe there would have been an outcry in Israel." (*New York Times*, 1 March, 1998). This anomaly about Israeli democracy, not well known and rarely cited, is compounded by the fact that, as I said above Israel's land in the first place was owned by Palestinians expelled in 1948; since their forced exodus their property was legally turned into Jewish land by The Absentees' Property Law, the Law of the State's Property, and the Land Ordinance (the Acquisition of Land for Public Purposes). Now only Jewish citizens have access to that land, a fact that does not corroborate *The Economist*'s extraordinarily sweeping statement on "Israel at 50" (25 April-1 May 1998) that since the state's founding Palestinians "have enjoyed full political rights.

What makes it specially galling for Palestinians is that they have been forced to watch the transformation of their own homeland into a Western state, one of whose express purposes is to provide for Jews and not for non-Jews. Between 1948 and 1966 Palestinian Israelis were ruled by military ordinance. After that, as the state regularised its policies on education, legal practice, religion, social, economic and political participation, a regime evolved to keep the Palestinian minority disadvantaged, segregated and constantly discriminated against. There is an eye-opening account of this shabby history which is rarely cited and, when it is, elided or explained away by the euphemism (familiar from South African apartheid) that "they" have their own system: it is the Report of March 1998 entitled "Legal Violations of Arab Minority Rights in Israel," published by *Adalah* (the Arabic word for justice), an Arab-Jewish organization within Israel. Especially telling is the section on the "discriminatory approach of Israeli courts", routinely praised by supporters of Israel for their impartiality and fairness. In fact, the report notes that the courts having delivered progressive and decent-minded decisions on the rights of women, homosexuals, the disabled, etc. have "since 1948 dismissed all cases dealing with equal rights for Arab citizens, and have never included a declamatory statement in decisions regarding the protection of Arab group rights." This is borne out by a survey of criminal and civil cases in which Arabs get no help from the courts and are far more likely to be indicted than Jews in similar circumstances.

It is only in the past year or two that investigations of Israel's political makeup, hitherto assumed to be socialist, egalitarian, pioneering, forward-looking, have turned up a rather unattractive picture. Zeev Sternhell's book *The Founding Myths of Israel* (Princeton 1998) is the work of an Israeli historian of twentieth century right-wing European mass-movements who finds a disturbing congruence between those movements and Israel's own brand of what Sternhell rightly calls "nationalist socialism". Far from being socialist, Israel's founders and subsequently the polity they established were profoundly anti-socialist, bent almost entirely upon "conquest of the land" and the creation of "self-realisation" and a new sense of organic peoplehood that moved steadily to the right during the pre-1948 years. "Neither the Zionist movement abroad," Sternhell says, "nor the pioneers who were beginning to settle the country could frame a policy toward the Palestinian national movement. The real reason for this was not a lack of understanding of the problem but a clear recognition of the insurmountable contradiction between the basic objectives of the two sides." (p.43). After 1948, policy towards the Palestinians clearly envisioned that community's disappearance or its political nullity, since it was clear that the contradiction between the two sides would always remain insurmountable. Israel, in short, could not become a secular liberal state, despite the efforts of two generations of publicists to make it so.

After 1967 the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza produced a military and civil regime for Palestinians whose aim was Palestinian submission and Israeli dominance, an extension of the model on which Israel proper functioned. Settlements were established in the late summer of 1967 (and Jerusalem annexed) not by right-wing parties but by the Labour Party, a member, interestingly enough, of the Socialist International. The promulgation of literally hundreds of "occupiers' laws" directly contravened not only the tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but the Geneva Conventions as well. These violations ran the gamut from administrative detention, to mass land expropriations, house demolition, forced movement of populations, torture, uprooting of trees, assassination, book banning, closure of schools and universities. Always, however, the illegal settlements were being expanded as more and more Arab land was ethnically cleansed so that Jewish populations from Russia, Ethiopia, Canada and the United States, among other places, could be accommodated.

After the Oslo Accords were signed in September 1993 conditions for Palestinians steadily worsened. It became impossible for Palestinians to travel freely between one place and another, Jerusalem was declared off limits, and massive building projects transformed the country's geography. In everything, the distinction between Jew and non-Jew is scrupulously preserved. The most perspicacious analysis of the legal situation obtaining after Oslo is Raja Shehadeh's in his book *From Occupation to Interim Accords: Israel and the Palestinian Territories* (Kluwer, 1997), an important work that demonstrates the carefully preserved continuity between Israeli negotiating strategy during the Oslo process and its land occupation policy established in the Occupied Territories from the early 1970s. In addition Shehadeh demonstrates the tragic lack of preparation and understanding in the PLO's strategy during the peace process, with the result that much of the sympathy gained internationally for the Palestinians against Israeli settlement policy and its dismal human rights record was frittered away, unused and unexploited. "All the support and sympathy," he says, "which it took years for Palestinians to rally, returned home, so to speak, with the mistaken belief that the struggle was over. The Palestinians, as much as the Israelis, helped in giving the false impression through, among other things, the highly publicised media image of the Arafat-Rabin handshake, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved. No serious attempt was made to remind the world that one of the main causes of the conflict after 1967, the Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, remained intact. This is not to speak of the other basic unresolved questions of the return of refugees, compensation, and the issue of Jerusalem" (p.131).

Unquestionably the moral dilemma faced by anyone trying to come to terms with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a deep one. Israeli Jews are not white settlers of the stripe that colonised Algeria or South Africa, though similar methods have been used. They are correctly seen as victims of a long history of Western, largely Christian anti-Semitic persecution that culminated in the scarcely comprehensible horrors of the Nazi holocaust. To Palestinians, however, their role is that of victims of the victims. This is why Western liberals who openly espoused the anti-apartheid movement, or that of the Nicaraguan Sandanistas, or Bosnia, or East Timor, or American civil rights, or Armenian commemoration of the Turkish genocide, or many other political causes of that kind, have shied away from openly endorsing Palestinian self-determination. As for Israel's nuclear policy, or its legally underwritten campaign of torture, or of using civilians as hostages, or of refusing to give Palestinians permits to build on their own land in the West Bank — the case is never made in the liberal public sphere, partly out of fear, partly out of guilt.

An even greater challenge is the difficulty of separating between Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish populations who are now inextricably linked in all sorts of ways, despite the immense chasm that divides them. Those of us who for years have argued for a Palestinian state have come to the realization that if such a "state" (the inverted commas here are definitely required) is going to appear out of the shambles of Oslo it will be weak, economically dependent on Israel, without real sovereignty or power. Above all, as the present map of the West Bank amply shows, the Palestinian autonomy zones will be non-contiguous (they now account for only 3 per cent of the West Bank; Netanyahu's government has balked at giving up an additional 13 per cent) and effectively divided into Bantustans controlled from the outside by Israel. The only reasonable course therefore is to recommend that Palestinians and their supporters renew the struggle against the fundamental principle that relegates "non-Jews" to subservience on the land of historical Palestine. This, it seems to me, is what is entailed by any principled campaign on behalf of justice for Palestinians, and certainly not the enfeebled separatism that movements like Peace Now have fitfully embraced and quickly abandoned. There can be no concept of human rights, no matter how elastic, that accommodates the strictures of Israeli state practice against "non-Jewish" Palestinians in favour of Jewish citizens. Only if the inherent contradiction is faced between what in effect is a theocratic and ethnic exclusivism on the one hand and genuine democracy on the other, can there be any hope for reconciliation and peace in Israel/Palestine. Fudging, waffling, looking the other way, avoiding the issue entirely, or accepting pabulum definitions of "peace" will bring Palestinians and, in the long run Israelis, nothing but hardship and insecurity.





Clockwise: The Prince of Wales wearing a *kippa* at the United Synagogue in London where he attended a service to mark Israel's 50th anniversary on 29 April; US Vice-President Al Gore and Tipper Gore with the Netanyahus, in Jerusalem last Thursday, toasting Israel's 50th anniversary and Al Gore's belated 50th birthday; Israeli soldier standing guard on the roof of the Israeli prime minister's office where US and Israeli flags flutter in the wind; The Gores laying a wreath at Yad Vashem on Mt. Herzl in Jerusalem last Friday *(photos: AFP and AP)*



Kevin Costner

Michael Douglas

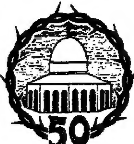


Winona Ryder

'None of these luminaries are particularly known for their Middle Eastern expertise or enthusiasm, although all of them praised Israel's greatness and enduring achievements'



'Real Jews'



50 Years of dispossession





Left: Vladimir Jabotinsky, founder of the Betar-Tagar. Right: Menachem Begin, former Betar commander and Israeli prime minister

How does Israel defend its interests abroad? In the first of an occasional series, Peter Snowdon in Paris calls round for a cup of coffee and a chat with the young Zionists of the Betar-Tagar

It wasn't difficult to get in touch with the Betar. I'd imagined that any organisation which went round Paris shouting racist slogans and issuing communiques claiming responsibility for beating up Arabs must be relatively low profile, if not completely underground. Of course, the Front National do that kind of thing, and they're in the phone book. But they do it on behalf of the French people. The Betar do it on behalf of Eretz Israel.

On 27 February, the Betar brought the Middle East "peace process" to the Ile de la Cité in central Paris. As supporters of Roger Garaudy left the court room opposite Notre Dame where sentence had just been handed down on the revisionist philosopher, a crowd of Betarim were waiting for them. Insults were traded, and amid cries of "Dirty Jews" and "Kill the Palestinians", a fight broke out. Several people were injured. Among the victims were two Egyptian journalists, who were attacked a little later as they were making their way to a nearby Metro station. According to *Le Monde*, it was the Betar who started it.

Hardly the kind of people who are likely to advertise their services in the yellow pages. Yet, as it turned out, nothing could have been easier than to contact them and arrange a meeting. I rang the Consistory — the governing body of French Judaism — and explained my problem to Yitzhak in the Press Department. Of course, he cried, but of course he could put me in touch with the Betar. I wondered aloud if they were a marginal group. "*Mais non, mais non!*" he replied, as if shocked by the idea that a Jewish group could be marginal. "They have an office. I will give you their telephone number. You can go and see them. They will make you at home. You will see that they are very fine young people. It is an excellent idea for you to write something about them to correct all the misleading information in the press." I promised I would do my best. "You have heard of the Jewish Defense League?" asked Yitzhak. "Sometimes, my dear sir, it is necessary for Jews to organise and defend themselves, because nobody else will help them."

My Jewish friend, N, had told me something about the Betar approach to self-defence. In his youth, the Betar were famous because they travelled everywhere dressed as if for a golf match. "That way," he explained, "they could always have a few golf clubs with them, without anyone asking any questions." In the 1980s, they specialised in breaking up private parties among Front National supporters. Their actions rarely made it into the press, since their adversaries preferred direct reprisal to legal proceedings. Until I spoke to Yitzhak, I hadn't met a single French Jew who had a good word to say for the Betar. But N told me he remembered his younger brother saying, at the time when the FN was just beginning its rise to power, "At least, if things get really bad, there'll always be the guys from the Betar." Today, the FN has more than 15 per cent of the national vote and controls the balance of power in a number of French regions.

The Betar-Tagar have their Paris office on one of the city's less glamorous boulevards, lodged in between a cafe serving *spécialités d'Alsace* and an Afro-Caribbean hairdresser's. On the main door is a plaque advertising courses in Kinomichi. The Betar really like to be in the thick of it — as if one diaspora wasn't enough for them, and they have to muscle in on everyone else's as well. The walls of the staircase leading to the first floor were daubed with violently anti-semitic slogans. I knocked on the heavily-armoured door and a young man showed me into a corridor festooned with wiring where the ceiling was in the process of being disembowelled.

I had come to meet Moti. I didn't know what Moti did exactly, and I never discovered his second name. He had been "delegated" by the Jewish Agency, he told me. His office was small, cramped, papers piled high on every available surface, walls covered with maps, postcards, pictures. When it had Moti in it, it was even more cramped. Moti wasn't fat, so much as he was bulky. He seemed constrained by all the papers, the tracts, the furniture, and yet at the same time, he wasn't in revolt against those constraints: he had accepted them. They were part of his bulk, his mass: part of what had to be dealt with.

"Coffee?" said Moti. While he went to fetch it himself from the vending machine in the hall, I looked round at the posters and slogans that filled the room: "Tremble anti-semites", one intoned, "the Tagar is watching you." A small postcard showed a group of Ancient Egyptians in Pharaonic dress whipping a group of slaves on a building site. Underneath were the words: "Ever since then, the Jew has only been free in Israel." A photograph of Netanyahu shaking hands with Arafat was completed by the legend: "Let's get him a portable phone — just like Yehia Ayache!". I was beginning to feel at home already.

Moti came back with my drink. "I'm sorry," he said, "I just have to send a fax." He leaned back in his chair, and his girth loomed proudly towards the edge of the table, as if daring it to try and push him back within his negotiated limits. I was just wondering what this urgent message might be —instructions to an active unit to mount a raid or spring a trap? — when Moti turned to me and asked: "Do you know the Musée André Jacquemart?" I had to admit I'd never been. "You really ought to go," said Moti, reproachfully. Running a bomb-detector deftly over an envelope, he ripped it open, removed a handful of brochures, and handed me one. "They've just reopened after restoration," he explained. "One of the finest collections of decorative art in Europe. I'm trying to fix up a guided tour for next Tuesday."

I wasn't sure if this was an invitation or not. But as our interview wore on, and Moti repeatedly broke off explaining his movement's ideology or his view of the peace process to haggle over the price of an air ticket or discuss the arrangements for a dance class, it slowly dawned on me that that's the funny thing about the Betar-Tagar. It isn't a front, an elaborate cover — a gang of thugs masquerading as an art appreciation association. It's an organisation run by and for people who genuinely believe that a passion for Empire-style furniture and the willingness to give those whom they perceive to be their enemies a good beating are not merely morally compatible, but are, in some sense, equally important social functions.

Doubtless that's how they come to be an official association, part of the Jewish Agency's Education Department and affiliated in France to the Ministry for Youth and Sports. Betar is an acronym which stands for *brith Joseph Trumpeldor* — the Joseph Trumpeldor alliance. They were founded in 1923 as the youth wing of the Revisionist movement within the World Zionist Organisation (WZO) by Trumpeldor's friend Vladimir Jabotinsky, with whom he had organised the Zion Mule Corp to fight alongside the British at Gallipoli. Trumpeldor and Jabotinsky have quasi-mythic status in Revisionist circles: Trumpeldor, as the First Jew to die for the homeland (he was killed defending the colony of Tel Hai in 1920), Jabotinsky as the man who created the first Jewish army sincethe fall of Massada in 135 — the Jewish Legion, formed in 1916 to fight with the British against the Turks in Palestine.

The Revisionists sought to "revise" the policies of the WZO, in the sense that they were more clear-sighted than their mainstream rivals about the need for force if the Zionist project was to succeed. They could see that the conventional strategies — secret diplomacy and large-scale financial facilitation (bribery) — were unlikely to achieve their ends, since none of the great powers had at that time any real interest in seeing a Jewish state established in Palestine. The Zionists would only get their state if they fought for it. Jabotinsky said as much in 1923: "Zionism is a colonising adventure, and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force. It is important to speak Hebrew, but unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot."

Whether Jabotinsky really felt the need for guns was unfortunate is unclear. Some time later he told an American journalist: "Revisionism is naive, brutal and primitive. It is savage. You go out into the street and pick any man — a Chinaman — and ask him what he wants and he will say one hundred per cent of everything. That's us. We want a Jewish Empire. Just like there is the Italian or French on the Mediterranean, we want a Jewish Empire."

I guess Moti knew all this, but he wasn't volunteering any of it when we met. He was very strong on all the mythic stuff, though. He quoted Jabotinsky to me at some length on the importance of keeping Zionism 'pure'. I'm not sure quite what 'pure' means in this context, though for Moti it seemed to imply the nobility of what he was doing. Speaking of Jabotinsky (or of Trumpeldor — it wasn't always clear who exactly he had in mind), he told me: "He was a new kind of Jew — not a ghetto Jew, a Jew attached to his immediate community, but a proud Jew, who learned how to use a gun, and once he had learned, put this skill at the service of his country. He was a descendent of King David — a poet and a fighter, an officer and a gentleman". But in fact this aristocractic vision of his mission was Jabotinsky's problem, as much as his solution. He saw himself as a Jewish Garibaldi, but he collaborated with Petliura, Mussolini and the Polish Colonels. About the only good thing one can say about him is that he drew the line at Hitler — which is more than can be said for many of his lieutenants. It was Mussolini's naval academy at Civitavecchia which turned the Betar from just one more impetuous brownshirt gang into the disciplined organisation which would become, in turn, the Haganah, the Irgun and the Stern Gang. As one Jewish historian has put it: "He was the liberal-imperialist head on a totalitarian body."

If revisionism is pure, it is in the sense that it is more or less entirely empty of any specifically "Jewish" content — indeed, of any content at all. It is a complete break with tradition, as Jabotinsky's one-time disciple Arthur Koestler saw. It replaces the Torah and the Midrash with the Kalashnikov and the Smith and Wesson. Once you have your state you can fill it with whatever you like: old French armchairs, Habad rabbis, illegal settlements. It is against the diaspora, not because it is all over the place, but because it saps the moral character of "the Jew". Indeed, listening to Moti was like being transported back in time: in his conversation, nations are not inherently complex and self-divided collectivities, but types, to be summed up in a single capitalised figure: "the Jew", "the Arab", "the German". Moti told me: "We say: It isn't normal that an Israeli Jewish mother should send her children to protect a kibbutz in the north, and that a French Jewish mother shouldn't do the same. The Jew of the diaspora isn't and never has been capable of defending a Jewish child who calls out for help." He added, dismissively, as if it was just another example of this kind of generalised incompetence: "We saw that with the six million".

Once I'd got over my initial trepidation, I'd been quite genuinely prepared to like Moti, even if I wasn't prepared to believe everything he said or approve of everything he did. Can a man who devotes his life to introducing adolescents to the pleasures of ormolu and Meissen be all bad? But by the end of the interview, I wanted to pick him up and shake him — metaphorically, at least. (Literally might have been quite risky.) In his hands, the Holocaust is no longer a human tragedy, just a statistic which shows both how seriously Israel ought to be taken, and how careless, how "negative", Jews who deny Israel can become. Just as Zionism has always agreed with other racialist ideologies that there really is a "Jewish problem", so Moti seemed all too happy to blame the diaspora for the Final Solution. But that's always been the Revisionists' problem: they can't wait to eliminate the Jews of the diaspora and replace them with that organic, self-assertive monad, "the Jew". As Jabotinsky himself put it: "Liquidate the diaspora, or the diaspora will liquidate you".

So Moti and his friends are doing their best to create a new race of "proud" Jews in France, and prepare them for emigration to Eretz Israel. They do this through providing low-cost informal education for the children of Jewish families who can't afford the private Jewish schools. Their aim is to develop in their charges "good behaviour, good citizenship and good 'Jewishness'". This education, Moti explained, covers a variety of different activities: current affairs and media analysis ("Often, the young person, he is stupid"), games, debates, dancing and singing (in Hebrew), help with homework, and sporting actitivies. I was tempted to ask at what age they began practising their golf. "All our monitors have a monitor's certificate from the French state. That's the great thing about informal education," said Moti, "you can use it to convey any kind of message you want".

I was intrigued by the games. What kind of games do you play, Moti? "We have board games where you have to progress around the map of Israel. Or we take a silhouette of a man, and we say: Write down five things about this man which make him Jewish." That sounded a little racist: wasn't he worried about that? This, it turned out, was Moti's favourite subject:

"What makes someone a Jew? Not wearing the kippa, not respecting kosher and the sabbath. There are many different ways of feeling Jewish. It's not up to me to tell people which is the right way. But to realise one's Judaism, there must be a national value. Here we have nothing to protect us against mixed marriages or anti-semitism, so the Jew has a problem of responsibility." He paused. "Have you heard of Entebbe?"

Yitzhak had asked me the same question the day before. In 1976 a cell of Bader-Meinhoff terrorists with support from a Palestinian splinter group hijacked an Air France flight from Ben Gurion to Paris and diverted it to Entebbe in Uganda. While the rest of the world hesitated, Israel sent a crack special services unit to storm the plane. The only Israeli soldier killed during the operation was Yoni Netanyahu — the brother of Binyamin.

As Moti told me the story of Entebbe all over again, I began to realise how much for the Revisionists, Netanyahu's election isn't an aberration, but a homecoming — how for them, even more perhaps than under Menachem Begin (himself a former Betar leader), Israel now finally has the government it deserves. Binyamin Netanyahu's father was Jabotinsky's first political secretary, and Yoni is a hero to the Betarim on a par with their founders — a modern Jabotinsky, a second Trumpeldor. They've even named the programme they run in Israel to prepare new immigrants for military service after him. "The French Jews," said Moti, employing a rare (derogatory) plural, "have never really said thank you to Yoni Netanyahu. He was the first to volunteer [for Entebbe]. As soon as he heard what had happened, he said: '*I don't care what anyone thinks, I have to go and help them.*'" Moti looked me straight in the eyes and laughed: "I was almost going to say: *That* is a real Jew!"

Moti may have laughed, but I don't think he was joking. The real Jew, for the Betar, isn't the most pious or the most ethnically pure: he's the one who is most inhabited by the 'will to Jewishness', and most ready to translate that will into an act of physical force. You can tell a real Jew, not by his skull-cap, his features or his diet, but by the notches on the butt of his rifle.

Yet for all their talk about making the *aliyah*, about emigrating to Israel and defending the kibbutzim of the north, most of the hard-core Betarim end up staying on in France, where at least they can pick on someone smaller than themselves. And when they do go to Israel, they don't like it: they can't stand being in a country that's "overrun" with Arabs (not to mention a large number of "ungrateful" Jews, who would like to make peace with them).

Yoni would have come in handy at the Garaudy trial, that's for sure. But was beating people up and shouting "Death to the Palestinians" really a demonstration of good behaviour, good citizenship, good Jewishness? "I don't have to answer false accusations," said Moti, feigning an Olympian indifference. "There are some young Jews who came. That's all." That's all? "I can't reply to and refute everything that has been said. There were so many people there. But I can tell you that I'm not worried about the people who got beaten up." Really? "I can condemn violence in general." Of course. "But those people were not pure and innocent. They were there to defend Garaudy. They are anti-Semites. If we shouldn't defend ourselves, then the Warsaw uprising was wrong too! I don't like the fact that anti-Semitism dares come out and appear in public. It should be ashamed, and if it is to be shamed, there has to be a Jewish youth that is proud of what it is, and which condemns all this verbal, intellectual and racist violence."

I began to get the feeling that Moti wasn't very concerned with conceptual nuance. Just as he seemed unwilling to differentiate between people of different races who hate each other and people of different races who fall in love with one another (mixed marriages/anti-Semitism), so he didn't seem to distinguish, other than at the pragmatic level of what might be an appropriate and effective response, between the might of the German army massed on the banks of the Oder and a couple of unarmed Arab journalists trying to catch the Metro back to their hotel.

I tried to steer the conversation back onto firmer ground. Didn't you issue a communique? "When we issue a communique, we say what happened there," Moti huffed: "No one says that it was a guy from the Betar, that it was a Jew who did this or that! All we say is that the negationists were 'corrected'. I suppose it was a Jew — responding to a racist provocation," he added disingenuously.

So there you have it: the Betar weren't taking responsibility, they were just acting as a kind of volunteer news agency, keeping the world informed. Maybe all those classes in media analysis aren't so good for the Jewish character after all. Surely, if it wasn't the Betar who did this, you should issue a denial? Moti affected a certain world-weariness: "I don't have to react to defamatory statements and false information." He laughed again. "If I had to reply every time that people said the Betar smashed up such and such a place, I'd never leave the office!" I told him I quite understood how irritating that could become.

But what about Palestine and the Palestinians? Have they no place in the Betar's vision for Israel? This, in my opinion, is were things got really nasty. "If I had to answer as one human being to another human being who is called the Palestinian or the Arab," said Moti, weighing each word, "if the person opposite me has a humanist vision, then we can find a solution. But if," and here his voice rose, "if he doesn't have a humanist vision, *if he isn't a human being*, if he is an *anti-Semite* — then I have to find another kind of solution."

Moti didn't tell me what that solution would be; but then, he didn't need to. You can see it unfolding every day, as "the Jewish revolution that is Israel" tightens its grip on Judea and Samaria, and the people who live there are driven out of their homes, stripped of their rights and herded into ghettos, just as surely as the Jews of Warsaw ever were. But that's what happens whenever a people becomes a 'problem' to be 'solved'. And that's the Palestinians' tragedy: to live in a country where a bunch of self-appointed 'humanists' get to decide who is and who isn't fully human.

I thanked Moti for his time, and left. I could have kept on asking questions, but what was the point? Walking slowly back along the boulevard, past the snack bars selling *merguez frites*, the Indian haberdashers and the Turkish newsstands, I tried to imagine what an Israel run by Moti and his friends would look like: walls of bronze against a hostile world, very cheap flights, very extensive golf courses, flashy European furniture to impress the visitors, the Arab 'servants' discreetly out of sight — and the wiring hanging out everywhere.



Israeli Ambassador Avi Pazner (centre), flanked by Jaques Chirac and Lionel Jospin at the festival celebrating the founding of Israel at the Trocadéro in Paris, on 30 April (photo: AFP)

Swimming against the Seine

It was a great 50th birthday party for Israel in France, writes Hosni Abdel-Rahim, where anti-Zionism is now tantamount to anti-Semitism

The huge posters are everywhere, all bearing the Star of David and inviting the reader to "come with us to dance, sing, laugh and weep". Where? To a free party at the Paris Trocadéro on Thursday 30 April 1990, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel.

Open a newspaper, and you'll find a special dedicated section or supplement. Not all of them are as objective as the eight-page insert in *Le Monde*, which was not afraid to deal with the inherent contradiction of the Israeli state — between its supposedly democratic nature and its systematic discrimination against its Arab citizens, or between the socialist-Zionist values of its founding fathers and the free-market militaristic creed of today. Elsewhere, the mainstream media was entirely devoted to uncritical congratulations.

Why this extraordinary bias? The 50th anniversary party follows in the wake of the widely-publicised trials of Roger Garaudy and Maurice Papon. For a whole year, these two court cases have monopolised public consciousness. Garaudy's book, and the Abbé Pierre's solidarity with its author, aroused fears of a return to traditional anti-Semitic Catholic values, while Papon's trial reminded the French of the Vichy government's collaboration with the Nazis and played on their sense of guilt. As a result, it is now more or less impossible in France to question the achievements — even less the existence — of the state of Israel.

Those who do are immediately tarred with the same brush as Garaudy and Papon, even if they don't share a single one of their ideas, and even if they clearly see Papon for what he is — a fascist bureaucrat who sent Jews to Auschwitz in much the same spirit as he later in 1961 ordered the murder of hundreds of Algerian immigrants who supported the FLN.

Nevertheless, some French Arabs together with a handful of progressive French intellectuals are trying to organise an alternative 'celebration', to commemorate "Fifty Years of the Occupation of Palestine by the Zionists". They have got up a petition in support of the right of return for Palestinians from the diaspora, and have organised a number of events aimed at exposing the aggressive and militaristic nature of the Israeli state. They are also trying to distribute two documentaries about the Palestinian refugee camps, but not surprisingly, finding buyers is proving hard.

The average French citizen has little sympathy for the Arabs, whom he thinks of as mainly poor immigrants and terrorists. Those who attempt to redress the balance are swimming against the tide of opinion, though a number of French intellectuals, especially Daniel Bensaid and Pierre Bourdieu, have been actively engaged in this campaign. Perhaps the participation of such respected figures, who are well-known for their anti-racist and anti-discriminatory positions, may help. But whatever they can do will only ever be a drop in an ocean of pro-Israeli sentiment.

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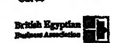








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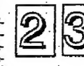
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Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life





2

Under the heading "Thoughts and opinions", *Al-Ahram* published over a period of two months in 1913 a series of satirical articles giving an insight into the daily life of rural and urban Egyptians. The articles criticised government bureaucracy and bad customs and traditions. Some of the bad social customs that came under fire were the rituals of ascertaining the bride's virginity on her wedding night and the practice by village families of marrying off their daughters while still under age. Dr Yunan Labib Rizk devotes this instalment of the *Diwan* series to a review of the 11 satirical articles

"A journalist, like a doctor, is obliged at times to take preventative action by exposing the sources of malady and corruption in order to eliminate them and avert the damage they cause." In so saying, Hussein Suleiman Al-Zankaluni introduced a series of 11 articles, appearing in *Al-Ahram* from 11 July to 11 September 1913 under the title "Thoughts and opinions". One might suspect that Al-Zankaluni was actually a journalist by profession, but the names of the columnists of *Al-Ahram* rarely appeared alongside their articles. Al-Zankaluni's series provides a refreshingly sharp and witty insight into various aspects of the daily circumstances of both rural and urban Egyptian life at a time when most newspaper coverage was marked by a rather sullen conservativeness. The topics covered by the series can be roughly subsumed under three categories: the government bureaucracy and the system of justice, bad customs and traditions and, finally, questions of sanitation and health. If there is a common thread running through the author's assorted criticisms levelled against Egyptian society it is his gift for sarcasm, reflecting the inherent Egyptian inclination to find humour, even in the most distressful situations.

Since Egypt is the first centralised state in the history of mankind, government bureaucracy has borne the brunt of popular grievances which have been given voice from "the eloquent peasant" of Pharaonic times to the caricatures of Ahmed Ragab today. It is little wonder, therefore, that this would be our satirist's first thrust of attack.

"This certificate has been issued upon the request of its owner, and the issuing authority assumes no responsibility for its contents." Thus reads the customary rubric which we can still see on many government documents up to the present. If indicative of anything, it is of that time-honoured bureaucratic tradition of evading responsibility, even for documents that have been signed and sealed by government officials. Al-Zankaluni addresses this concern beneath the headline "The Railways Authority is not responsible." He writes: "If you want to send some oil, liquid or a package by rail, the Railways Authority gives you a paper which says that it does not accept responsibility for the freight. The rest is up to luck. If the railway workers in charge of the freight are honest, your package will arrive intact. If not, you will receive it empty, or at best half full, depending upon the integrity of the workers. If you complain to the station-master, he will answer that he is not responsible, which is the same answer you would get from the Authority, should your complaint get that far."

In a similar vein, Al-Zankaluni relates a story involving the government's announcement that it would reward those village elders and mayors who demonstrate their dedication to the preservation of the peace and public order. On one occasion a village elder noticed that a man was trying to sell a water buffalo calf at too cheap a price. The elder "suspected foul play and arrested the man. Upon investigation, he discovered that the calf was stolen and that the seller was the thief. When his excellency the directorate chief learned of this good deed, how did he reward the elder? With a word of thanks, which can hardly be spent in these bad times."

The sluggishness of the justice system is nothing new. In his acerbic fashion, Al-Zankaluni relates another story epitomising this flaw. He was passing by a courthouse one day when he noticed a gathering of people in front of it. "They had such expressions of sorrow and gloom that I thought I would approach to learn the cause. I asked one of the people what the matter was, and he responded, 'We are born of God and to God we shall return.' I immediately understood that one of his relatives must have died inside the courthouse, so I began to utter the appropriate phrases of condolence. Finally, I asked him what the cause of death was and which relative or friend had died. He answered, 'We are born of God and to God we shall return. Justice died.'"

The writer had another peeve against the justice system. He felt that "many judges show excessive clemency, particularly with repeat offenders, which inspires criminals to scorn the law and disdain the dignity of the court." In his opinion, this demonstrated the judges' ignorance of the nature of the people of the countryside, where "severe rulings are the most potent medicine against the ailment of the disruption of law and order, since such rulings will inspire evil doers to dread the consequences of their deeds. Clemency should be used only with those who commit simple crimes, and then only if the circumstances of the accused merit such mercy."

Maltreatment by the police was another concern. Al-Zankaluni writes, "Dozens of people have had the bad luck to have been rounded up and herded into police stations where they suffer beatings and abuse with such foul language as to make dumb animals recoil."

Abuse of power also had its bureaucratic side, particularly when the authorities themselves were the subject of the complaint: "A policeman may assault whomsoever he wishes, because if the victim tries to file a complaint, it is bound to be stamped 'shelved'. If the victim brings in witnesses to testify to a policeman's abuse and the investigating officer starts to investigate, soon the officer will hear a little devil whispering to him in his ear, imploring him to stamp on the file: 'shelved'."

One facet of the officials' abuse of authority particularly merited the author's sarcasm. He relates the story of a village mayor who wanted to travel by rail, yet to keep his destination secret. "When he asked the station-master for a ticket, the stationmaster naturally asked the mayor his destination. The mayor looked at the man with a mingling of astonishment and offence. 'Why do you want to know where I'm going? It's a free world now, so give me a ticket and be done with it.' The station-master promptly closed the window of the ticket office in the face of the mayor, in accordance with the principles of general freedom and complete idiocy."

Many of the popular customs which were the butt of Al-Zankaluni's pen are no longer with us today, although that cannot be said of all of them. The popular custom of ascertaining the bride's virginity on her wedding night, which continued to be widely practised in the countryside after mid-century, provoked his scorn and outrage.

Also earning his derision at wedding ceremonies were the "drummer buffoons", as he called them. These drummers would entertain the guests with "tales so ribald that they burn the ears of decent people. It is no secret that these drummers use such abominable expressions that make the listener tremble. They are unsuitable to be heard in the villages of the countryside, let alone in the cities and the homes of civilised people, which is why we have taken it upon ourselves to alert the authorities to this phenomenon."

For many years, it had been a custom for villagers to marry off their daughters while still under age. While Al-Zankaluni also found this custom deplorable, he selected a rather amusing instance to drive home his point. In a village near Zaqaziq, a girl who had not yet reached the age of nine had been married off by her parents. The girl "was waiting impatiently for the arrival of the feast at the end of Ramadan, not in order to spend those three days in marital bliss, but in order to go to the 'feast market' and play on the swings." The young girl's whims were not to be thwarted. "On the third day of the feast, after having been kept home for the first two, she slipped out of the house and made her way by dawn to the 'feast market' in Zaqaziq. She only returned to her husband's home by nightfall, and then very reluctantly."



Illustration: Makram Hanein

From weddings Al-Zankaluni proceeds to funerals, where he observed another "objectionable custom". When a man dies, he writes, "a large assembly of women, their hands died black, assemble and go around the village, wailing and beating on drums. Some of the women hoist his clothes and turban on the tips of swords, bayonets or poles while others wrap themselves in ropes and grab handfuls of dirt and dump it over their heads... After they bury the corpse, they bring in professional mourning women, who inflame the grief of the relatives of the deceased with hideous words chanted to the accompaniment of drums and tambourines.

Al-Zankaluni next turns his attention to common vices, notably drugs, smoking and gambling. While hashish and opium smoking were still widespread at the time, we note from "Thoughts and opinions" that the Egyptian government had already begun to criminalise the commerce in drugs by "cracking down on the hashish and opium merchants and raiding their homes and dens."

Smokers, whose numbers were sharply on the rise in those days due to the rapid growth of the cigarette industry, were treated to some sound advice. Firstly, they should smoke in broad, open spaces where the air dissipates the smoke and does not tax the respiratory system.

Secondly, they should not smoke when walking at a rapid pace, engaging in sports, dancing, bicycling or walking uphill, as smoking during such strenuous activity taxes the respiratory system and the sharp exhale of smoke is harmful to the nostrils.

The dangers of the addiction to gambling he warns against by citing the case of a man who pawned his young bride on their wedding night in order to acquire money to lay out on the gambling table.

Al-Zankaluni's advice and observations on questions of sanitation and health make for particularly entertaining reading. In addition to the customary advice to Egyptians regarding the best means to exterminate flies, bodily cleanliness and ascertaining that they only use purified water, he offers a handful of other interesting tidbits. Beneath the heading "A curious treatment for pains in the joints," he recounts the story of a friend of his who was afflicted with rheumatism: "It so happened that one day a wasp stung him on his right hand, causing him severe pain and swelling. But when the pain ceased, he found that he could move his hand without pain. Having made this fortuitous discovery, he exposed his right leg to the wasps and there too, once the pain faded, he felt a considerable relief. Now whenever he feels his affliction setting in, he exposes the troublesome limb to the wasps and the pain ceases immediately."

Although Al-Zankaluni warns that many animals, such as cats, dogs and birds, can carry germs, he is not without some admiration for these creatures. Beneath the heading "The intelligence of dogs" he recounts that a rural notable had noticed that his dog, after eating, would bury the remnants of his food in a certain place. When the owner began to remove the stash from its hiding place, the dog began to bury his leftovers in a secret place in the garden outside of the owner's line of sight. The heading "The faithful dog" introduces the story of a farmer who had decided to take a short nap in his field. While he was sleeping "a large snake coiled itself around the man. When the dog spotted it, he tried to chase away the snake for fear that it would harm his master. Unable to succeed in this manner, he took hold of the head of the snake and held on to it with his mouth until both animals died, while the life of the dog's owner was saved."

As a final note, and one of inspiration to us all, Al-Zankaluni advises his readers to laugh as much as possible. According to some studies he had come across, "laughter has numerous benefits and is perhaps the most effective medicine for the mind and body. The laugh that comes straight from the heart is of the highest restorative and curative effect... Laughter brings infinite good at no cost."



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business

Non-farm payroll | Inflation | Dow Jones | GDP

Mobil executive invited to talk at 36th Annual IAA Congress

ROBERT J O'Leary, general manager of Global Public Affairs for Mobil Corporation, has been invited to speak at the 36th annual IAA World Advertising Congress taking place from 10-13 May at the Cairo International Conference Centre.

The International Advertising Association (IAA) is a partnership of advertisers, agencies, media and marketing communications professionals whose mission is to promote the value of advertising and the critical role advertising plays as a vital force behind all healthy economies. The theme of this year's congress, Interaction, is innovative and ties well with the rich and diverse history of interaction in Egypt, dating back over 5,000 years. Speakers of the highest calibre will discuss communication, from hieroglyphics through to the next millennium.

Mobil's speaker, Mr O'Leary, oversees the corporate positioning and advertising programmes, crisis communications, media relations, as well as employee and financial communications. He is responsible for the recent advertising campaign which positions Mobil as leader and partner — the qualities of a great global company.

Before Mobil, Mr O'Leary spent most of his career in the information technology industry. He was vice-president of public relations and advertising for Unisys where he was responsible for all worldwide advertising programmes as well as all product and marketing public relations activities.

Prior to joining Unisys in late 1988, he spent 11 years with IBM in several different US and international advertising and public relations positions. Among his assignments were managing the award-winning IBM personal computer advertising programme. Mr O'Leary also managed IBM's advertising and promotion programmes for the Far East and Latin America.

In his speech entitled "The Medium *isn't* the Message", Mr O'Leary will talk about communications through changing times and medium, and will stress on the importance of a focused, comprehensive message.

"In Mobil Oil Egypt, we conducted independent market research to develop the message which we need to convey. According to the findings, Mobil is seen as a leader and a pace setter; a company which continually innovates and that can be trusted," comments Sherine Mishriki, manager of advertising and public affairs. "There wasn't much we needed to change in the way the brand was viewed here, so the trick was to reinforce this image through the brand positioning campaign. Our message comes top life by demonstrating leadership and partnership in the communities in which we operate in Egypt."

For further information kindly contact Mobil Oil Egypt, Public Affairs Department at tel. 355-4850, fax 355-4984. Address: 1097 Corniche El-Nil, Cairo, Egypt.

Biography: Robert J O'Leary



ROBERT J O'Leary serves as general manager of Global Public Affairs for Mobil Corporation. Mr O'Leary joined Mobil in November 1995 and oversees Mobil's worldwide public affairs activities, including media relations, crisis communications, corporate positioning and advertising programmes, as well as employee and financial communications.

Before Mobil, Mr O'Leary spent most of his career in the information technology industry. He was vice-president of public relations and advertising for Unisys where he was responsible for all worldwide advertising programmes as well as all product and marketing public relations activities.

Prior to joining Unisys in late 1988, he spent 11 years with IBM in several different US and international advertising and public relations positions. Among his assignments were managing the award-winning IBM personal computer advertising programme. Mr O'Leary also managed IBM's marketing communications programmes for the Far East and Latin America.

Before IBM, Mr O'Leary worked for six years in public relations and advertising for United Technologies Corporation in Hartford, Connecticut. He is a graduate of Penn State University.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 23-30 April 1998

Closing On 30/4/98 341.24 Points

352 350 348 346 344 342 340

3/31 4/2 4/9 4/13 4/15 4/21 4/23 4/28 4/30

The NBE Index has decreased by 2.78 points to register 341.24 points for the week ending 30/4/1998 against 344.02 for the week ending 23/4/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %
Alexandria Pharmaceutical	+10.3
Upper Egypt General Contracting	+10.2
Upper Egypt Flour Mills	+4.3
National Societe General Bank	+4.0

Company	Change %
General Company for Silos & Storage	-8.3
Alexandria Iron & Steel	-6.7
Housing & Development Bank	-5.1
TeleMisr	-4.5

Mobil Oil Egypt sponsors IAA Congress

MOBIL is an energy company. So why sponsor an advertising congress? The answer is simple. Advertising is about communication. Communication between a company and the community in which it does business. Advertising brings a company to life, helps people identify with it and its products. But successful advertising and successful brands are built on trust and must always deliver value.

Mobil has worked hard to establish an effective communication strategy which is built on trust in its brand by demonstrating, and not just talking about, leadership and partnership. In Egypt, their brand positioning is brought to life through their partnerships with environmental agencies, with respected car manufacturers such as BMW and General Motors, and with the local community through sponsorship activities. By consistently being first with technological breakthroughs, for its products, its facilities and its services, Mobil, has also demonstrated its leadership capabilities in Egypt, as in the rest of the world.

Like all multinationals, Mobil faces the challenge of communicating a consistent message across multiple languages and cultures. The International Advertising Association (IAA) is comprised of over 35,000 delegates representing 95 countries. The mix of nationalities representing the different experiences of so many different countries is a beneficial opportunity for any multi-national with interest in communicating with the community in which it does business. The IAA is an excellent forum to cut across cultural barriers, to gain new insights into different peoples and the way they perceive messages.

Mobil believes in the importance of communication, and particularly, in the importance of the message. The hey is to harness all the elements of the communication mix to create and 'live' a consistent message that starts and ends with their audience's needs. This is the essence of the Mr Robert O'Leary speech at the IAA Congress next week. Mr O'Leary, a senior executive at Mobil, heads the company's Global Public Affairs section.

While positioning its brand, a company is missing out on one of its greatest assets — its name. That's what makes Mobil more than an energy company. That's what makes it a great global company, a leader in research and pioneering technologies; a company that cares about each community in which it works and the environment it works in. And that is the difference between a name and a brand.

Mobil is proud of its achievements in Egypt, and proud of the images and promises that the Mobil brand conjures.

The Canal remains sacred

The People's Assembly was the scene of heated debates this week on the threats to the Suez Canal from a free-market economy and difficult trends in international trading conditions. Gamal Essam El-Din attended

The People's Assembly Transport and Communications Committee, infuriated by recent reports about an alleged government decision to privatise the Suez Canal, this week debated the future of the Canal in a free-market economy. The parliamentary committee also debated a panoply of real and perceived threats to the earning power of the Suez Canal, including a planned Red Sea-Mediterranean canal through Israel, the Sumed oil pipeline, the Qatari-Israeli gas linkups, and the negative impact of the recent financial crisis in Southeast Asia.

Addressing the committee, Admiral Ahmed Fadel, chairman of the Suez Canal Authority (SCA), emphasised that the canal was "not and never will be" on the government's agenda for privatisation. He added that the recent media furore around this subject was entirely artificial. It had been caused, he contended, by the announcement of the government's decision to sell off 30 per cent of its shares in the Suez Canal Investment Company (SCIC).

"The SCIC is a closed joint-stock company with a paid-up capital of LE2 million, taking the form of 20 million shares. It was established in 1981 with the objective of providing the SCA's highly experienced employees with job opportunities at retirement age in such areas as port services and navigation agencies," said Fadel.

He indicated that the SCIC was jointly owned by the SCA and its employees' insurance fund, with each of them holding 50 per cent of the shares. However, he added, the Canal Port Service Company subsequently bought 25 per cent of the employees' shares. According to Fadel, the SCA also decided this year to sell off its 50 per cent holding to employees. "The SCA took this decision not only because the SCIC should be entirely owned and run by the employees themselves, but also because this makes sense in the context of the government's new privatisation initiative under which the state is divesting itself of its shares in joint-stock companies. This 'privatisation' is something completely different from the alleged decision to privatise the Suez Canal itself that was reported.

Far from reaching the $2 billion mark in annual receipts which SCA had hoped for over the last two years, Fadel indicated that Canal earnings were down 5.3 per cent to just $1.783 billion for 1997 year, compared with almost $1.849 billion in 1998. Admiral Fadel attributed the drop to the fact that traffic of tankers carrying exports of Arabian crude oil to the United States have fallen. "The United States has begun to depend on short-mile range routes in meeting its oil needs. In other words, the US is meeting its oil needs from nearby production sites such as the Caribbean Sea and Nigeria, at the expense of sites in Saudi Arabia and the Arabian gulf. This has caused a loss of $200 million in revenues on oil tanker traffic in the Suez Canal," said Fadel.

Second, Fadel indicated that the current financial meltdown in Southeast Asia has also had an obvious negative impact on the canal. The most significant aspect of this, he said, was the drop in the number of ships going through the Canal from Southeast Asia to the North and back.

According to Fadel, the SCA operates in IMF special drawing rights (SDR). "It is a basket of currencies which the SCA resorted to in the seventies for charging transit fees, because the US dollar was at that time subject to strong fluctuations. This basket includes 39 per cent US dollars, 21 per cent German marks, 11 per cent French francs, 11 per cent pounds sterling and 11 per cent Japanese yen. In 1996, the price of this basket dropped by 6 per cent, and in 1997 it dropped by 5.3 per cent. This is the major reason behind the drop in the canal's transit revenues, regardless of any prior factors," said Fadel.

According to Fadel, the SCA has recently taken steps to combat today's more difficult international trading conditions. He explained that the SCA has conducted serious studies about deepening the canal to allow for ships with a draught of 72 feet by the year 2010, an increase from 58 ft at present. "When the canal's depth increases to 72 ft, it will be able to accept all kinds of ships, including 92 per cent of ultra-large crude carriers (ULCCs) and oil tankers," Fadel explained.

Complementing the above steps, Fadel explained that the SCA has also resorted to non-traditional ways of generating greater revenues, such as manufacturing two ship tows and providing attractive discounts to ULCCs. He indicated that the SCA has recently reached a "partnership joint-venture agreement" with the Danish company A B Moller, the largest ship building company in Europe to help build the largest floating dock in the world for ship building, repair and maintenance.

For their part, the committee's deputies expressed their common belief that the Suez Canal is one of the holiest of holy things in Egypt, and that any attempt to privatise it should be considered as an act of treason.

El-Badri Farghali, a leftist MP, charged both Israel and some "Arab Gulf royals" with waging a war against the Suez Canal. Israel, he said, has spent $5 billion in two years on developing the ports of Ashdod, Eilat and Haifa as an alternative route for international trade traffic in the Middle East. He also asserted that Israel is still trying to arrange to carry Qatari natural gas to foreign markets through its ports on the Mediterranean. In conclusion, he also charged that the Sumed Suez-Mediterranean pipeline's offshore terminal at Ain Sukhna accommodates only ULCCs, at the expense of the Suez Canal which cannot take tankers of more than150,000 dwt.

In response, Admiral Fadel emphasised that no alternative routes, be they via Israel or anywhere else, could ever compete with the Suez Canal. "We can very easily kill off any rival projects and we have committees to keep close tabs on all kinds of competitors in this respect. As for Sumed, this is a friendly pipeline, and there is no competition whatsoever between Sumed and the Suez Canal," Fadel said.

IMF declares reforms successful

An IMF mission in Cairo this week praised the progress made by the Egyptian government on economic reform and expressed optimism for the future. Niveen Wahish reports

Following its sixth quarterly review of Egypt's 24-month Standby Arrangement, an IMF mission concluded that the Egyptian government has made significant progress on economic reforms, withstanding problems caused by the Luxor massacre and oil price fluctuations as well as the uncertainties associated with the Asian stock market crisis.

"The economy has shown some resilience to these developments," said Howard Handy, assistant director of the IMF's Middle Eastern Department, adding, "We have formed a rather favorable impression of the manner in which the economy has been able to absorb the shocks."

The Standby Arrangement is the third in a series of agreements through which the IMF has been supporting the Egyptian reform programme since 1991. Since the outset, fund officials have praised Egypt's progress in fiscal reform but have criticised the government for falling short of expectations on structural adjustment. However, more recently, the IMF has been appreciative of the progress made in areas which the government was reluctant to attack in the early stages of reform, particularly privatisation.

Speaking at a press briefing, Handy said that the Egyptian economy has been performing remarkably well in recent years. He pointed out that growth rates have picked up and now exceed five per cent, inflation has fallen from over 20 per cent to under four per cent and progress towards reducing income inequalities has been made. Egypt's budget deficit, currently under 1 per cent of GDP, is "enviable by the standards of emerging markets." The state of Egypt's foreign debt, Handy said, has now "fallen to modest and manageable levels."

While these achievements indicate Egypt's commitment to reform, neither Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid nor Handy specified the form which the relationship between Egypt and the IMF will take after the agreement expires in September. Handy said that "we are in the process of discussing with the Egyptian authorities how best we can meet their requirements and support their economic reforms over the medium term. These discussions are taking place against the background of a very successful standby arrangement."

On a similar note, Ebeid said that Egypt and the IMF are partners. "We are strong believers in the continuity of reform, we intend to keep our relationship with the IMF as strong as it was and we will seek to strengthen that relationship."

Speaking of the challenges facing the Egyptian economy, Handy said that raising the rate of growth was a major target. "We want to see the Egyptian economy growing at a faster pace to be able to absorb the large labour force and reduce the level of poverty," he said. He recommended that Egypt raise its savings and investment ratios which are still low by the standards of developing countries. This is done, according to Handy, by promoting financial stability and the private sector and disengaging the government from the productive areas of the economy.

An essential part of the IMF-recommended reforms is privatisation. In this regard, Handy said that "Egypt is among the top four emerging markets in terms of the pace of privatisation." He added that privatisation receipts have reached 1.5 per cent of GDP, which compares very well with other privatising economies.

Handy pointed out that privatisation is a long process. "Privatisation in Egypt is only in its infancy. You have got to give them time," he said, in response to a charge that the government was moving too slowly. He said that the efforts that have been made by the government in this area are good, signalling its long-term intentions.

Ebeid said that the government is privatising at a rate of four companies per month: "We keep in the pipeline a stock of companies that are ready for privatisation for the eight months to come." Ebeid also made it clear that once the government began to feel that it could move forward with privatisation successfully, it began moving faster and, in addition, decided to embark on the privatisation of infrastructure, such as power stations and the telecommunications authority.

Supporting Ebeid's view, Mauro Mecagni, the IMF's resident representative in Egypt, said that Egypt is privatising at a faster pace than other countries. He pointed to the fact that the last six months have witnessed a number of moves that have widened the scope for private sector participation, concerning activities such as port-related companies, mobile telephones and corporatisation of electricity and telecommunications. "It has opened up a very wide spectrum of initiatives," Mecagni commented. "This is a fact that has to be recognised."

On the issue of exports, Handy said a more dynamic export sector is needed. Although he admitted that the government's policies are clearly supportive of the export sector he said that tangible improvement will take some time and argued that there are many non-tariff barriers that have yet to be addressed. Without further progress on reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, the potential for raising export growth is undermined, he said.

Another area of concern to the IMF is the degree to which Egypt has been able to attract foreign direct investments [FDI]. "So far, Egypt's performance in attracting FDIs has been rather disappointing," Handy said.

More aid, more questions

Despite the disbursement of $60 million in US economic assistance to Egypt this week, questions remain over the future status of American aid. Aziza Sami explores the prospects

The release of $60 million of USAID funds to Egypt this week, providing cash transfers until 1999, has nothing to do with current talks between the Egyptian government and the US administration over the timing of an eventual reduction of US economic assistance to Egypt, a USAID official in Cairo said.

The official explained that the aid had been previously negotiated through the Sector Policy Reform Programme begun in 1992 as a reward for Egypt's successful implementation of reform in five important sectors of its economy: maritime companies and ports, tariffs, reducing the budget deficit to LE2.3 billion from 1996-97, the rationalisation of public sector enterprise debts and the improvement of financial sector regulations protecting investors.

Praise was also forthcoming from USAID's top official, administrator Brian Atwood. "We are celebrating Egypt's achievement in fulfilling reforms in the financial sector, in the tariffs structure and in giving the private sector a bigger share of the economy," said Atwood, who signed the disbursement accord with Minister of State for Planning and International Cooperation Zafer El-Bishri. Atwood was accompanying US Vice-President Al Gore during Gore's visit to Cairo last week.

The aid accord comes at a time when the gradual reduction of US economic assistance to Egypt ranks high on the agenda between the Egyptian and US governments. The issue was dealt with briefly during Gore's meetings with President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo. Negotiations began last April during visits to Washington by the Egyptian ministers of finance, trade and economy.

Informed sources say the Egyptian government wants to maintain the current $850 million that USAID provides annually, until 1999.

Another question on the agenda is speeding up the utilisation of the



Source: The United States Agency for International Development

$1.7 billion pipeline deposits already allocated to projects but so far unused. Also under negotiation are the sectors which future aid will focus upon. Part of the aid has already been directed to the partnership between Egypt and the US, which aims at replacing the aid programme with trade and investments.

The remaining portion of aid will go into supporting the economic reform programme, as well as to sectors in which the private sector is not heavily involved, such as education, health and environment.

Nevertheless, despite the axiom 'from aid to trade' adopted by Egypt and the US and exemplified by their partnership agreement, the effect of a cut in US economic assistance to Egypt remains unclear. An ultimate phasing-out of aid would necessitate more direct investments which although forthcoming, still fall short of what is needed.

Over the past 20 years, $19 billion in US economic assistance has been given to Egypt. In the mid-seventies, the programme covered basic infrastructure, services and telecommunications, expanding to health, education and agriculture in the mid-eighties and, with liberalisation, diverting part of the funds to the emerging private sector.

With the advent of economic reform in 1992, the programme has been reoriented to supporting privatisation and liberalisation in the trade, fiscal, financial and agricultural sectors — all the elements which, in effect, will create a market economy.

"Over the past 15 years, US [economic] aid was, and still is, very important to the Egyptian economy, in production, agriculture and in infrastructure, which alone received 26 per cent of this year's aid," El-Bishri said.

The question of the future of economic assistance is politically significant as well, because of the context in which it was born, namely the Camp David peace accords with Israel, which set up the two largest overseas US assistance programmes.

Egypt receives $2 billion in total US aid annually: $1.2 billion in military assistance and $800 million in economic aid.

By comparison, Israel receives $3 billion from the US per year, including $1.8 billion in military assistance and $1.2 billion in economic aid. However, in January, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu announced before a session of the US Congress that Israel was ready for a reduction of US aid and would submit proposals to this effect. The Israeli plan sees the US gradually cancelling economic assistance by diverting 50 per cent of the aid to military assistance, thus raising the latter from $1.8 billion to $2.45 billion. The scheme would see a reduction of the other 50 per cent at a rate of five per cent annually, starting in the year 2000. The reduction scheme will be applied over a 10-year period.

Due to the current US policy to minimise foreign assistance programmes worldwide because of budget constraints, the reduction of aid to Egypt and Israel comes as no surprise. But skeptics still wonder about the timing of the Israeli proposal. They argue that the question of aid reduction is being highlighted in the US Congress so as to put pressure on Egypt because of its position on the peace process and its insistence that Israel adhere to the Oslo Accords and relevant UN resolutions.

The question remains whether the US will be ready to negotiate a similar pattern for diverting aid to Egypt.

Planning with the Palestinians

Egypt and the Palestinian Authority tried last week to give a boost to joint trade and investment, but Israeli government actions remain the biggest headache. Dina Ezzat and Mona El-Fiqi report

With strong political motivation and over 10 new agreements, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority (PA) are hoping that stronger economic bonds will serve the interests of both sides.

Egyptian-Palestinian trade, mostly Egyptian exports, is currently a meagre $30 million a year. Last week, during a meeting of the Egyptian-Palestinian joint committee in Gaza, hopes were raised that the figure could be increased to $500 million.

This, both sides concede, is a long-term objective. However, with the recent signing of joint agreements for bilateral cooperation that cover trade, industry, investments, taxation and technical know-how, Egyptians and Palestinians believe they are now ready to cement stronger ties.

The joint committee convened for two days starting 28 April and was chaired by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa on the Egyptian side and Palestinian Minister for Planning and International Cooperation Nabil Shaath.

By virtue of the agreements the two parties will take the necessary steps to eliminate custom duties on exports on both sides. A list of tax-free imports was approved by the committee. According to the list, the PA will no longer pay tariffs on 14 mainly agricultural products. At the same time, the PA will no longer levy duties on Egypt for its exports of eight mostly industrial commodities.

"There has been decent progress in economic relations between our two countries as bilateral trade jumped from about $20 million to $30 million last year. Still, we could have done much better had it not been for the problems created by the Israeli authorities for Egyptian exports to the PA," said one informed Egyptian source. Palestinian exports to Egypt, as well as to other countries, have been affected by economic blockades imposed by the Israeli government over the last few years.

Abdel-Satar Eshra, secretary-general of the Egyptian Federation for Chambers of Commerce (EFCC), who represented the federation during the Gaza meeting, said a trade committee dealt mainly with Israel's hindering of Egyptian exports to Palestine. "The Israeli government is trying to monopolise the Palestinian market," Eshra said.

He added that total Palestinian imports reached $2.5 billion annually, of which 90 per cent are Israeli goods.

Although the Egyptian side is committed to the quotas agreed upon, the Israeli government imposes strict inspections on Egyptian exports, Eshra said.

Wasting both time and money, the Israeli authorities prevent Egyptian trucks carrying cement from entering the self-rule areas, forcing the exporter to unload his trucks at the border and re-load on Israeli trucks.

Israeli trouble-making does not stop there. According to Adel Ayoub, senior vice-president of the Arab Contractors, one of the few Egyptian companies with projects in Palestine, things are sometimes worse. For example, the Israeli authorities insist on inspecting 10 per cent of the Egyptian exports. "The result is that 10 per cent of goods such as cement and fruits are damaged while the cost of Egyptian products increases more than Israeli goods," Ayoub said.

Israeli government action has proven to be a major impediment to the company's operations in the self-rule areas. "A few weeks ago, the Israelis stopped our work at a Gaza mill because, they claimed, its fence obstructed the roadway to an Israeli settlement," Ayoub said.

And, although construction work on Gaza International Airport was completed, it had not yet opened because the Israeli authorities are holding up the inspection procedures of the airports' equipment.

Despite these problems, the Arab Contractors is still negotiating for other projects worth about LE30 million because the PA is still in need of huge infrastructure facilities.

Meanwhile, Egyptians and Palestinians admit that they still need to put more effort into facilitating their own bilateral trade and economic relations.

According to Eshra, one of the problems brought up in the trade committee was the apparent lack of information, on the Palestinian side, and about available Egyptian products and their prices. There were also complaints from the Palestinians about the high prices of Egyptian goods. The committee recommended inviting Palestinian delegations from various sectors to visit Egyptian factories and companies and get to know their goods and prices.

To enhance better cooperation, attending the joint committee in Gaza last week were a number of Egyptian businessmen, part of the 25-member delegation, investigating potential business opportunities. Moreover, both sides agreed in principle to pursue inter-trade cooperation and financial dealings in any convertible currency so as to enable the PA to take advantage of grants and loans.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Learning from failure, building on success



Fawzi Mansour **suggests that the recently created movement of 15 Third World countries, due to hold its eighth summit session in Cairo next week, may well usher in a second wave of Third World liberation**



Not so long ago, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) would promote a series of semi-official national, regional and tri-continental meetings in preparation for its periodical plenary international conferences. UNCTAD was then the UN agency most seriously concerned with problems of Third World development as they relate to international economic relations. The preparatory meetings had the double aim of engaging as many Third World officials, academics and practitioners as possible in a serious dialogue on these problems, and mobilising as much public opinion as it could behind the proposed solutions. The second aim was as important as the first, since those solutions, more often than not, ran up against fierce First World opposition.

In early 1976, I attended one such tri-continental meeting in Sri Lanka, the participating continents being, of course, Asia, Africa and Latin America. In one of the plenary sessions, I proposed the adoption by the Third World countries of the following seven concise policy guidelines.

- Trade between Third World countries should be direct. Imports from and exports to Third World countries which pass through the mediation of a third party should be prohibited.
- A system of generalised preferences should be established between Third World countries. That system should cover transport and insurance as well.
- Payments from one Third World country to another should not pass through non-Third World intermediaries.
- Third World product associations which result in price increases should compensate other Third World countries for additional payments involved.
- Technology devised in Third World countries should be made available free, or on especially advantageous terms, to other Third World countries.
- Transnational Third World firms should have preferential treatment in Third World countries. No firm in which non-Third World capital participates can be considered a Third World transnational firm.
- Taxes should be imposed on all exports from Third World countries to non-Third World countries and on imports from non-Third World countries. The receipts of the taxes should be devoted to development purposes and managed by a special organisation in which all developing countries are equally represented.

At present, at a time the Third World is in retreat on all fronts, these guidelines may appear somewhat "heroic". When they were proposed, they did not seem so. They did create quite a stir, both in the media and in academia, but the reason should be ascribed more to the objective conditions then prevailing in the world at large rather than to the guidelines' innate cogency.

In 1976, the Third World was still basking in the glow of the first important rise in oil prices, which took place in the wake of the 1973 Israeli-Arab war and the restrictions on production and exports used by Arab countries as a weapon in this war. Subsequent effective concerted action taken by the more important oil-producing countries, Arab and non-Arab, helped maintain the level of prices then reached. On strictly economic grounds, the rise was merely an adjustment of ridiculously low oil prices maintained for decades by big oil companies, vehemently supported by their governments, which, together with banks and traders reaped the main benefits. These adjustments were made and, for quite some time, maintained, notwithstanding the fulmination, threats and schemes the First World used to defeat what they considered to be an unforgivable affront to their supremacy — to their ability to determine the volume of world production, as well as the location and prices of strategic commodities.

Like the oil-producing countries, other Third World producers of agricultural and mineral commodities (coffee, tea, cocoa, rubber, copper, tin, and so on) saw the real price of their exports steadily fall over decades, especially as compared with the rising prices of imports from the rich industrial countries. The result was a decrease in their foreign earnings, an increase in foreign debt and a continuous fall in standards of living. Notwithstanding vehement obstructionism from the First World, the successful example of the oil-producing countries encouraged them to set up or attempt to set up their own commodity producers' boards, associations and groups.

Third World countries had many grievances against First World economic supremacy. Many other channels existed through which surpluses flowed from the Third to the First World. Most trade and financial transfers between Third World countries had to be mediated by First World countries. These naturally reaped for themselves the notorious surplus which intermediaries have collected both from producers and consumers in every age and type of society, especially if these intermediaries managed, as the First World generally did, to create for themselves various monopoly positions along the lines of mediation.

The Hong Kong experience gives the measure of the enormity of this surplus. A little island with no natural resources or native industries to speak of, and a meagre population of 6.5 million, it managed, essentially through mediation activities in trade and finance, to build an economy reaching $700 billion (i.e. 25 per cent of mainland China) and achieve a per capita GNP of $21,650.

As applied to North-South relations, the term monopoly has far wider connotations than those usually outlined in orthodox (read Western) economic textbooks and their Third World imitations. It encompasses the exclusive historic sources of accumulation acquired by the West, the higher wages maintained there by trade union movements acting in a democratic setting, and the power relations between North and South, which forced on the latter a particular international division of labour favouring the former and hampering the development of the latter. The other monopolies in the fields of technology, advanced capital-goods sectors, transport and communication, banking, insurance, maritime transport and, of course, in pure and applied science (R&D) are included in the same concept of monopoly. They were — and still are — as important, in the transfer of resources from South to North, as the ever-deteriorating terms of trade.

The successes of the first wave of the national liberation movements (1945-1978), their important social and economic content, the example of the OPEC and other producers' associations, the flowering of various development theories in the Third World which freed many public opinion leaders (and far fewer of academics) from the incapacitating hold of obscurantist economic discourse masquerading as refined exact science: all this was translated, on the formal level, into the various United Nations declarations and resolutions which marked the '70s and so frightened the West. The Declaration and Action Programme on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (UN General Assembly Resolutions 3201 (S-VI) and 3202 (S-VI) of 1 May 1974); the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States (UN General Assembly Resolution 3281 (XXIX, 12 December 1976); and the resolution of the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Economic Cooperation in November 1975: these are three of the more remarkable examples of a series of historic UN resolutions dealing with the world economy and seriously taking into account the interests of the Third World.

The practical impact of these unprecedented charters and resolutions on the actual working of the world capitalist system (WCS), and hence on the disadvantaged position of the Third World, was rather limited. They were carried from the heated atmosphere of the General Assembly's hall to the register of accomplished legislation on the high waves of successive Third World military and political victories. When these victories dried up and ceased to astound the world, the UN legislative provisions became what every law not supported by power is: dry ink on the pages of closed books.

A new world economic order (WEO) was indeed ushered in in the wake of the second Gulf War of 1990/91, but it was a very different order from the one aspired to and voted for by the peoples of the world in the UN assemblies. Indeed, it was diametrically opposed, in both letter and spirit. I have no wish to determine here when the first great wave of Third World liberation subsided, for the decline of great historical movements is a protracted process which cannot be pinned to a definite date. Suffice it to say that the 1967 Arab defeat in the Israeli-Arab war and the subsequent generalised Arab decline on all fronts; the fratricidal (and suicidal) wars in Africa and elsewhere; the collapse of the Soviet Union — which, whatever may have been its genetic or acquired weaknesses, has been in most crucial instances a staunch ally of national liberation movements; the ignominious Iraqi-Iranian War and the foolish Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; and finally, the in-built weaknesses of the PLO: all have been landmarks along that road. No wonder the price of oil has now collapsed to an all-time low of $11, less in real terms than it was in 1971. Other raw materials, which are the mainstay of many poor countries' foreign earnings, are experiencing similar decline. Foreign debts, especially when measured against foreign claims on their meagre earnings, are becoming an intolerable burden and source of impoverishment.

These developments should come as no surprise to anyone who takes the WCS as the primary unit of social analysis. Just as, in a national capitalist system (NCS), relative or absolute impoverishment of the majority, unemployment or marginalisation of many and the spread of various manifestations of social disorder are the natural results of the working of its laws, so do these phenomena manifest themselves in the WCS on a world scale as a result of the working of the same laws — except, of course, that the mechanisms for surplus flow from the base to the top may be somewhat different.

The achievements of First World trade unionism, or "social democracy", in improving the conditions of labour in First World countries may not be reproducible on a world scale. Whereas the dominant class in the First World capitalist countries could afford to make concessions to their working classes at the expense of Third World countries onto whom the burden of such concessions was shifted, no similar shift could operate in favour of the dominated and exploited countries within the WCS. The First World countries cannot, as yet, compensate concessions made to the Third World by engineering a new flow of surpluses from the moon. The inevitable result is that, in a "fully achieved" WCS, impoverishment will hit the poor multitudes in its "base" countries harder than it ever did in a national capitalist system; misery and alienation will hit them in more various and cruel ways, and despair may drive many into the blind alleys of regression.

The experience of some east and south-east Asian countries may seem to give the lie to such dire predictions. There is no denying that, in their various ways, they achieved remarkable successes in emerging from the vicious circle of backwardness, in achieving unprecedented sustained rates of GNP growth, exports, balance of payment surpluses, application and adaptation of certain types of modern technology and, at least in some cases, in making concessions to some sections of their working people which improved their standard of living.

I do not know, however, that these success stories invalidate the analogy I have drawn between the essentials of the NCSs and the WCS. Contrary to many other social formations, and to some dogmatic theorisation, the capitalist system, whether national or global, usually allows a certain degree of mobility between the units which make up classes (individuals in the former and nations in the latter). This mobility is, however, limited to a definite minority: a small percentage of the privileged few joining the ranks of the impoverished majority, and an equally small (even minute) percentage of the poor rising to the ranks of the various levels of the bourgeoisie, but with a residual wide base in both cases remaining in its place. Britain may have sunk to join the "genteel" poor, and may not have been saved by the US for various geostrategic, political and cultural reasons. Japan, notwithstanding its various present difficulties, has definitely migrated to the rich zone of the world system.

The case of the four east Asian tigers is different, as indicated in an important study by three notable Egyptian economists.

The geopolitical and historical context in which these experiences took place was exceptionally favourable. For a considerable period before World War II, Korea and Taiwan were colonised by Japan, which, for its own purposes, and using very harsh practices, gave these two countries an adequate modern infrastructure, developed their mineral and agricultural resources, and established some heavy and capital goods industries — policies which ran counter to the colonial traditions of the West in the rest of the colonial world. Following World War II, with victories of socialism in China and the Soviet Union, the US and Britain were determined to make of the four colonies (later the four tigers) a showcase on the eastern edge of Asia, capable of competing for peoples' minds with their socialist adversaries. For that purpose, development funds flowed to them on an unprecedented scale; technology was obtained at no or low cost, markets were thrown wide open for their products in the metropolitan countries, radical agrarian reforms were not merely tolerated but positively encouraged, and so on. Most remarkable of all, development and trade strategies and policies (including a certain level of national planning and the development of a public sector), which were vehemently opposed in other Third World countries, were not frowned upon. Evidently, these favourable conditions, and many others, are not reproducible elsewhere.

The four tigers had in common many unattractive aspects which are usually glossed over by the promoters of their type of development. Notwithstanding the initial radical redistribution of wealth — especially land — and some nationalisation measures with which two of these began their trajectory, they all had to be subjected to extremely repressive types of regimes, especially vis-à-vis the working class. Wages had to be kept at a ridiculously low level in order to maintain their export advantage over high-wage more advanced countries. They thus burdened the disadvantaged poor with the enormous weight of the high rates of investment which was one of the main causes of their success.

I do not give much weight to the stories of corruption, nepotism and cronyism, especially within the financial sector, which were later blamed for their recent difficulties, for these pertain to the stages of primitive and early capitalist accumulation everywhere. Even now, the pages of contemporary advanced capitalism are not as lily-white as text books lead us to believe: witness the stories of corruption and mismanagement which periodically fill the papers in the US (the notorious Savings and Loan Bank scandal), the UK, Italy and Japan, especially in the same financial sectors which are blamed for the difficulties of the Asian tigers and cubs.

We should also discount as a reason for the recent setbacks the much-blamed high percentage of short-term foreign currency borrowing, much of which was used to finance real estate speculation, for in various periods these were also features of the US economy (for instance during the second term of the Reagan administration).

If these cannot be the main reasons for the setbacks which struck east Asian countries one after the other, then what were they? Those setbacks, it will be remembered, happened only after the collapse of the socialist system, and hence the disappearance of the need to maintain the east Asian economies as showcases. With the disappearance of this political imperative, economic considerations came to the forefront. One was of a profit-making nature, the other strategic.

As a result of fierce popular political and economic struggle, wages began to rise considerably, especially in South Korea and Taiwan. It became much more profitable for foreign capital, American, Japanese and other, to move much of their productive facilities to other east Asian countries, the so-called Asian cubs, where wages and other amenities were kept much lower. This enabled foreign investors to sell their products in their own domestic and international markets at cheaper prices and thus achieve much higher profits. This capital migration could not fail to have a deep destabilising effect on the previously favoured tigers, corruption or no corruption.

The strategic consideration stems from the internal economic and political needs of the highly developed countries themselves. Certain sectors of their economy — the so-called transnationals — may find it more profitable to move part or all of their activities to cheap-labour countries. Contrary to popular belief, however, these do not dominate the economic policies of their countries except with regards to certain sectors where strategic raw materials, e.g. petrol, are involved. Other countervailing factors, such as home labour interests and greater political and public awareness of the catastrophic societal results of de-industrialisation, may come into play. There are many indications that these factors are progressively coming to play a more important role in designing the strategy of First World countries, e.g. the various discrete restrictions on free trade with low-wage countries and the ominous policy restrictions affecting growth in the defaulting east Asian tigers and cubs imposed by the World Bank and the IMF.

Japan managed escape this fate because, for various historical reasons, it grew too big before it could be snared. China and India, each in its way, are not likely to fall into this trap because, before opening up to the outside world, they made sure that, under some sort of self-reliant development strategy, they built a broad, deep industrial base which could weather the turbulent storms of the WCS.

It is against the background that the series of summit meetings of the group of 15 Third World countries must be viewed. The first of these meetings was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1990; the eighth meeting is about to be held in Cairo. The movement is progressively broadening its aims from one summit to the next. It encourages deep reflection on the causes of the economic problems which plague Third World countries and on effective solutions. Most important of all, it strives to devise various organs and mechanisms charged with ensuring that these solutions are implemented. I venture to think that, following the collapse of the first Third World liberation movement, which began in 1945, the recent movement of the 15 Third World countries may well be ushering in the beginning of a great second wave of Third World liberation. Given the multifaceted crisis in which the First World seems to be engulfed, the world seems to be poised for such a rejuvenating movement.

In contrast to the first wave, it is essentially an economic solidarity movement, not a political one, though it is not oblivious to the wider political issues that can shape our world, such as the future of the non-aligned movement in the post-Cold War period, the necessity of restructuring the United Nations, especially the Security Council, and giving the poorer countries a more effective role in it.

The greater emphasis on economic questions, especially those relating to South-South cooperation, may well reflect a laudable awareness that formal political freedom does not necessary entail economic liberation and that, building on the restricted political freedoms acquired, the best road toward both sovereign political independence and genuine economic development is to concentrate on economically meaningful goals.

The new movement definitely incorporates the great goals of the '70s but adds to them more realism and practicality. Periodic summit meetings are insisted upon. A permanent bureau for the movement was created. Definite practical assignments such as the study policy coordination and increasing South-South trade, the creation of a Third World database, the criteria and measures of quality control and the mechanisms for strengthening links among businessmen in Third World countries have been assigned to certain countries for research.

The temptation, however, to transform summit meetings essentially into fairs for showing off and making business deals must be resisted, for the new creation should above all be a think-tank, a policy-maker and a decision-making body, not just a marketplace dominated by businessmen.

It is heartening to read that a "moderate" head of state has defined this effort as a "political-economic group representing countries of the South, defending their interests, striving to organise South-South cooperation and inaugurating a serious and equal dialogue with the North." This leader, in a recent public speech, added that, unless the international community enabled every country to introduce the economic transformations which take into consideration its own conditions, the word transformation will rightfully lose its legitimacy and become the monopoly of a definite group of peoples who reap the fruits of transformation, and lay down its rules, criteria and dispositions. Another head of state, whose country was vandalised by irresponsible — or perhaps intentional — financial speculation announced that, whereas the '90s were declared the decade of growth and sustained development in the North, for the South they are the lost development decade.

Most heartening of all is the fact that the Group of 15 does not set itself up as an exclusive club. It speaks in the name of the Third World, looks after the interests of its poorer segments and attempts to co-opt more countries.

Some countries of the South are still surprisingly absent, like South Africa. Less surprising, however, is the absence of the four Asian tigers. I certainly do not wish it upon them, but I think that future developments may convince them that their rightful place is with the rest of the Third World.

The Third World countries share the most essential causes of underdevelopment, many of its prominent features and certainly the iron constraints which the First World forces upon them. They nevertheless vary enormously in per capita income, levels of economic development, types of socio-economic formations, patterns of political and other institutions... These make for considerable divergences in their interests and in their relations with one another and with the outside world. These differences should not be allowed to break up the unity of the Third World. On the contrary, they can be transformed into grounds for strength, or at least into occasions for positive-sum package deals. The guidelines indicated at the beginning of the article were designed to make possible such a package deal. I believe they can still serve this purpose. This is an extremely important subject on which, for reasons of space, I cannot elaborate here.

One final point: being an integral part of the WCS, the dominated and exploited part, the Third World cannot hope that economic cooperation, in and by itself, will achieve more results than First World trade unionism obtained for its working classes. In fact, it can only hope for much less, for Third World countries act in a far less advantageous economic, social and political environment than did the First World trade unions. To aspire to more than that, the whole world system needs to be transformed, probably beginning with internal transformations in the major Third World countries themselves, based on the strategy of auto-centred self-reliant development.

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Al-Ahram Weekly

Nothing less than equal

Nothing came of this week's Middle East peace talks in London. It is likely that equally little will result from the upcoming meeting in Washington. Washington will never put the necessary pressure on Netanyahu's government to respect the agreements already signed with the Palestinians, with all their limitations; and the right-wing premier will continue to twist facts and waste time in fruitless meetings simply to give the world the false impression that things are moving. That, at least, was clear in statements made by Israeli and Palestinian officials during the London talks.

Netanyahu was making optimistic statements, brandishing "new proposals" and asserting that it was time for the Palestinians to meet them in the middle. The Palestinians expressed only pessimism. Most of the Arabs no longer believe that peace is possible with the Netanyahu government. The right-wing premier does not believe in the land-for-peace formula, which he calls "land for terrorism".

While Israel was celebrating its 50th anniversary, the international media finally admitted the fallacy of the Zionist argument that Palestine was a "land with no people", and that 50 years of Israel means 50 years of oppression and racism. The only solution to the Middle East peace problem is an independent state for the Palestinians, where they enjoy full citizenship rights and receive equal treatment. The compromise made by Palestinians and Arabs was their recognition of Israel's right to exist as an independent state within defined borders. Israel has to recognise that Palestinians must enjoy the same right.

The argument about percentages and redeployment is ridiculous. Palestinians, supported by the majority of the international community, do not want 9, 11, 13 or even 30 per cent. What they want is an independent state, and that is the only way to bring peace and stability to the Middle East. If the United States also recognises this fact, Monday's talks in Washington might bring some progress. Without that, the future holds only violence, bloodshed and chaos.

A self-evident truth could heal the wounds

If the Israelis could acknowledge their responsibility for Palestinian suffering, and admit the damage Zionism has done, there could be room for reconciliation, suggests John Whitbeck

French President Jacques Chirac's public acknowledgment in 1995 that his country bears heavy responsibility for the deportation of French Jews to Nazi death camps during World War II was greeted with universal applause. Since the truth of his acknowledgment was so self-evident, one wonders in retrospect why it was so difficult and why it took so long.

With the Middle East "peace process", which began in Madrid and accelerated in Oslo, having reached a definitive dead end, a similar statement of self-evident truth could produce immense psychological and practical benefits, restoring hopes for a decent future and a life worth living for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Richard Goldstone, the eminent South African jurist who served as the first chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, stated in connection with the human rights atrocities with which he had to deal that "the victimised group must be dehumanised or demonised. Once this is done, it frees ordinary people from the moral restraints that would normally inhibit them from doing such terrible things."

His principle is one of universal and timeless validity and is applicable to most of the settler-colonial transformations of recent centuries. For the past few years, the European-descended majorities in Australia, Canada and New Zealand have been making enormous efforts to provide compensation to their countries' dispossessed indigenous populations while implicitly or explicitly apologising for the injustices inflicted upon them.

While, at a governmental level, the United States has not gone so far, American books and films have in recent decades depicted the "winning of the West" in less than glorious terms and have exposed the brutality and shame of the genocide of the Native Americans.

At least for now, South Africa is a miracle. If the elixir of forgiveness and reconciliation drunk by Nelson Mandela and his compatriots of all colours could be identified, it should be bottled and widely distributed.

Both demographically and chronologically, Israelis face a much more difficult problem in accepting in their hearts and minds that those who preceded them on the land which Israelis have colonised and made their own are human beings entitled to basic human rights. In South Africa, the indigenous people remain an overwhelming majority, while in other settler-colonial states they have been reduced to tiny minorities. In Israel and Palestine, the victors and the vanquished are closer in numbers and the dispossession is closer in time. The wounds are still raw.

A durable Israeli-Palestinian peace is unimaginable so long as Israelis continue to dehumanise and demonise Palestinians and to treat them accordingly. Yet, psychologically, how can they do otherwise? If Palestinians are human beings entitled to basic human rights, then the transformation of Palestine into Israel (indeed, the entire Zionist experiment) is morally and ethically indefensible, since no moral or ethical framework (other than a purely race-based one) could justify doing to human beings what has been done to the Palestinians over the past century and continues to be done to them.

As Rehavam Ze'evi, leader of Israel's Moledet Party, which publicly advocates "transfer" (the Israeli euphemism for the forced expulsion of the remaining Palestinians living in Israel and Palestine) and which Mr Netanyahu has recently invited to join his governing coalition, has stated: "We came to conquer land and settle it. If transfer is not ethical, then everything we have done here for 100 years is wrong." Exactly. Yet how many Israelis, who, like Palestinians, are human beings, can stare that reality in the face?

The 20th century's major "isms" — communism, fascism and Nazism — are now almost universally recognised to have been tragic mistakes, even if many who embraced them were idealists who honestly believed that they were working to build a better world. Now that 50 years have passed since Israel's replacement of Palestine on the map of the world, perhaps it will no longer be taboo to pose the question whether political Zionism may not also have been a tragic mistake — not just for those who found themselves in its path but also for those who embraced it.

Whether there will ever be a true peace between Israelis and Palestinians depends less on the negotiated terms of any agreement than on the achievement of a moral, spiritual and psychological transformation among both Israelis and Palestinians. Achieving such a transformation will be devilishly difficult, particularly after the crash of the once soaring hopes engendered by the recent "peace process". However, three sentences of self-evident truth, spoken solemnly, publicly and with humility by an Israeli prime minister (perhaps the next one, reasonably soon) would be an excellent starting place:

"We recognise that the realisation by the Jewish people of their destiny and their self-determination as a people and a nation has, inevitably and unavoidably, entailed great suffering for the Palestinian people. We understand that the Palestinian people view their fate as one of almost unparalleled injustice. We deeply regret this and hope that Palestinians (as well as Israelis) can now put the past behind them, focus firmly on present realities and future possibilities and accelerate and redouble their efforts to build a new and better society of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and human dignity in the land both our peoples love."

The writer is an international lawyer who writes frequently on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

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The Palestinian state [2]

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that, whatever the celebrations of Israel's fiftieth anniversary, in the absence of a Palestinian state, the very legitimacy of Israel is questionable

Half a century after the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, in implementation of a truncated version of the UN General Assembly resolution of 29 November 1947 calling for the partition of the former British protectorate into two states, it is high time for the rest of the resolution to be implemented. Until the package deal contemplated by the resolution has been finalised, that is, until an Arab Palestinian state is established, the legitimacy of the resolution is itself in question.

As matters now stand, the only available mechanism by which to reach this goal is the Middle East peace process. Judging by its performance to date, the process is unlikely — at least, in its present form — to lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state as the sine qua non for a just and equitable solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. That is not to say that the alternative to the peace process is necessarily war if only because the international setup would not tolerate all-out war in the Arab-Israeli conflict. An outbreak of hostilities would be closer to generalised terrorism throughout the region than to conventional warfare — a 'lose-lose' situation for all the protagonists.

It will be remembered that the seeds of the Middle East peace process were sown during the Second Gulf War. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait convinced the Gulf — and other Arab — states that Saddam posed a more immediate threat to their security than any other regional party, including Israel. American diplomacy, particularly George Bush's Secretary of State James Baker, succeeded in selling them on the idea of neutralising Israel as an enemy so that they could devote their efforts to countering the Iraqi challenge. Hence their acceptance of the peace process launched at the 1991 Madrid conference.

But it has proved impossible to build an equitable peace with Israel when the point of departure for an Arab-Israeli peace was basically an Arab-Arab war. For even the most moderate Israelis, those who believe Israel's salvation lies in making peace with her Arab neighbours, will always be tempted to exploit the contradictions within Arab ranks to avoid making the 'concessions' necessary for a breakthrough. Of course, on the Arab side, these 'concessions' are rights; but in Israeli eyes, even the most moderate, they are 'concessions'.

These moderates are caught between two fires: on the one hand, they need to move forward with the peace process, which entails making concessions in the name of peace; on the other, the resistance of an important constituency in Israel which opposes the very idea of concessions, acts as a constraint on their ability to do so — even assuming they want to. As a result, the proponents of peace in Israel come out looking indecisive and inconsistent — to the advantage of hawks like Netanyahu. This is what happened after Rabin's assassination and Peres' takeover as acting prime minister. The situation ended with the return of the Likud to power. Some could argue, of course, that Peres' defeat and Netanyahu's victory were not predetermined. In fact, however, this outcome was dictated by the very logic of things; even if it could have been avoided in the 1996 elections, the Likud was bound eventually to come to power. For in the long run, Israel's hawks are much more consistent in their stand than its doves.

It is also in the logic of things that all agreements between Israel and the various Arab parties were signed behind the backs of the other Arab parties. Each Arab party has dealt with Israel separately, beginning with the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel, continuing with the Oslo Accords between Israel and the leadership of the PLO and ending with the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty.

It is clear then that a whole new approach is necessary if any progress towards peace is to be achieved. The current peace process is obviously moribund; even its sponsor, the United States, is unable to breathe new life into it. The Clinton administration claims that it has a new 'initiative' for the resumption of the talks but has failed to substantiate the claim by coming forward with its 'initiative' in the open, perhaps because it realises how difficult it will be to have it implemented.

A new start is therefore unavoidable. That is not to say that the agreements reached under the auspices of the Madrid peace conference should be torn up, for this could create a still more critical situation, but that a new content should be given to the process launched from the Spanish capital. The fiftieth anniversary of the creation of Israel could be an opportunity to imbue the peace process with such a new content.

The Intifada, which was neither a procedural nor a legal process, nevertheless proved that the balance of power could be changed through direct action in the street. The same applies to southern Lebanon, where Hizbullah's resistance to Israeli occupation proved that the continued occupation of Lebanese territory was beyond the price Israel was ready to pay. Now Israel itself is proposing some form of withdrawal from southern Lebanon, exactly as it previously proposed to withdraw from most of Gaza when it was proving too hot to handle during the Intifada. While the proposal is not entirely innocent, being aimed in part at driving a wedge between Syria and Lebanon, it is also a reflection of Israel's recognition that its continued occupation of south Lebanon is exacting a heavy price.

The lesson to be drawn from the experiences of Gaza and Southern Lebanon is that a change in the balance of power is necessary for a new start. But that is not in itself sufficient. It would be wrong to conclude that the present impasse is due only to a lack of balance in the power game. If the impasse is to be overcome, the very rules of the game need to be changed. And there is no denying that peace can only be achieved if all the parties come out winners. It cannot be envisaged in a win-lose situation nor, *a fortiori*, in a lose-lose context.

Nizar and the *Harafish*

By Naguib Mahfouz

I was overwhelmed with sorrow when I heard of the death of the great poet Nizar Qabbani. Nizar was a man devoted to women and Arab nationalism with almost equal passion. His easy yet inimitable style touched people's hearts and minds, an especially remarkable achievement since poetry is a somewhat elitist art. But Nizar's lyrics became the songs and slogans of the Arabs.

Some people criticised him for writing more about women than about human suffering, the hardships of daily life. I always felt he was a fine poet and his lyrics will be beautiful forever.

I did not know Nizar closely. I have only met him once, when he was in Egypt and came to visit the *Harafish*. It was a wonderful evening, given over to politics and art. Our relation remained warm, although we never met again.

When I received the Nobel Prize, Nizar wrote an article which was published in Cairo, one I cherish as among the most striking and brilliant comments written at the time. He digressed, of course, to his favourite theme: women. He wrote, "If Naguib Mahfouz has produced 50 novels, we should also honour the woman who tolerated the writing of 50 novels!"

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

To The Editor

Righting a wrong

Sir- In a report published in *Newsweek* (20 April) on Israel's 50th anniversary, there are many signs of bias toward Israel.

In this report, it was claimed that this anniversary marks the independence of Israel. I want to ask: independence from what? Of a state which did not exist before 1948? It would be more historically true to call it the anniversary of the occupation of others' land, the anniversary of the date on which the Israelis usurped Palestinian land.

This report also claims that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. Is Israeli discrimination against the Palestinians democratic? Is it democratic to deny a people the right to self-determination?

Menachem Begin's son also claims that Israeli force persuaded Egypt and Jordan to sign treaties with Israel. He should have concentrated on his history lessons: it was the Arabs' 1973 victory that forced Israel to sign these treaties and to accept peace with Egypt.

The Western media are definitely pro-Israel, and it is our duty, as Arabs, to clarify the facts for Western public opinion. It is the duty of Arab thinkers and historians to defend the Palestinian, which is also the Arab cause: the cause of Palestine and Jerusalem.

Saad Abdel-Hafez
Menoufiya University

First principles

Sir- If Edward Said (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 9-15 April), can make non-Palestinians feel passionately about Palestine, what could he and Hanan Ashrawi do to the "four million Palestinians living abroad", who could contribute spiritually, morally and materially towards an effective "Palestine Fund" — as the Jewish lobbies in the US and worldwide do for Israel? Such a fund, of course, would be in the safe-keeping of irreproachable fund-raisers, treasurers, activists and administrators.

Palestine needs to conscript the minds, efforts and monetary resources of these "four million" bodyguards, by hook or by crook, to contribute to "the urgent matters" of "self-preservation, campaigning", as Edward Said writes, "against settlements" and "for self-determination".

"Unable to utter or even recall" the Palestinians' "own first principles"? They can start with a search for these, memorise and live by them, like the Ten Commandments.

With these principles as their standards, let Palestinians, know their enemies, infiltrate their minds and, subtly, inexorably, for better or for worse, use, honourably, the latter's ruthless, devious, vicious ways and means to reach and attain their own precious goals.

Mona Shaheen
Zamalek
Cairo

Help and hegemony

Sir- I read with great interest Mohamed Shafiq Gabr's article "A creed for the future" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 30 April-6 May), in which he fervently expressed his infatuation with the prodigious technological and economic advances of the US. The writer suggested that Egypt would lose much if it weren't for US aid and investment.

However, I believe that the sole aim of US aid to Egypt is to impose American hegemony over the Middle East. The US is now using two deadly weapons to implement its objectives: economic aid and economic embargoes. When one of them fails, it resorts to the other.

Let's consider the attitudes of both the US and Canada towards the Cuban regime. The US economic blockade against Cuba has been going on for over 35 years now, under the pretext of forcing Cuba to renounce communism and become a democracy, but to no avail. The blockade has only augmented the suffering of Cubans, many of whom are now fleeing their country under the pressure of stringent economic conditions.

On the other hand, Canada has taken a completely different stance. It has just started what it calls a "constructive engagement programme", which aims at enhancing economic development in Cuba. Canada believes that pushing for democracy and human rights can be done by means other than economic blockades and sanctions. Canada is determined to succeed where the US has failed.

Just about everybody will agree that America is on the move, though there is plenty of argument about the direction. In America today, there is a surplus of food and a surplus of manufactured goods, but the problem is the surplus of people who think they know how to run the world.

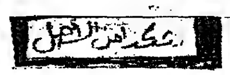
If we choose to do everything America wishes us to do, we will be going on a blind date with fate. I am afraid Egypt is slowly moving into the American cobweb. It will be next to impossible for us to slip through the net.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Assiut

All readers' contributions and comments should be addressed to The Editor. E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg; Fax: +202 578 6089



When I drew Robin Cook, I realised he looked a bit like a preoccupied professor of astrophysics. His unruly beard, hair and eyebrows all contribute to the impression that he is affable, but preoccupied with highly complex calculations. His face is warm, though, and pulls you in from the first glance. His gaze is direct and straightforward. These, one thinks, are eyes that could hide little. Behind his lips, slightly parted in a hesitant smile, friendly teeth lurk. His ears are attentive, as they must be, to hear what is going on outside the island.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Just a delusion

Finding themselves empty-handed at the festivities of Israel's 50th anniversary, the Arabs may resort to their traditional panacea and affirm that Israel not only influences, but indeed dominates and master-minds policies and the media in Europe and the US.

In his book about the role of the Jews in politics and history, Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri presents us with another theory on the influence of the Jewish lobby that works to win Western public opinion over to Israel. Most significant among these groups is the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). This committee exercises great leverage on the legislative authority in the US. AIPAC mobilises all the resources available to Jewish and Zionist societies in support of clear policies and objectives which serve Israeli interests, whether this entails promising presidential candidates financial and moral support or taking more direct initiatives.

In his elaborate and well-documented study, Elmessiri notes that the Zionist lobby is not restricted to Jews. In fact its membership includes wealthy financiers who see their economic power as contingent on the fragmentation of the Arab and Islamic world, policy-makers who subscribe to the same views, liberals who advocated a more forceful deterrent policy against the Soviet Union when it existed, conservatives who perceive Israel as a bastion of Western civilisation and US interests, and fundamentalists who see the rise of a Jewish state as a sign of salvation.

The Zionist lobby also includes non-Jewish, non-Zionist elements who may even be hostile to Judaism, yet are prepared to back the same causes because of the role Israel plays in the Middle East, and especially because Western and Israeli interests coincide.

On these grounds, Elmessiri disagrees with the assumption made by so much of Arabic political writing: that the Zionist lobby often directs American policy onto courses that compromise US interests. He contends that many Arab political writers have never contemplated the possibility that, for the US, the status quo of "controlled instability" in the region may be the ideal means to defend US interests in the Arab world. Thus, the Zionist-dominated media and the Zionist lobby may be nothing but a cheap way of accomplishing whatever mission is assigned to them.

While such a perspective may be radically opposed to all current Arab policies, which have designated the US as mediator, arbitrator and sponsor of the peace process, such a perspective may provide a clear explanation for many phenomena which smack of complicity and procrastination, and the one step forward, one step backward approach characterising US policy. US support for Israel is inversely correlated with the inter-Arab situation: support for Israel is greater when Arab solidarity declines. Deception ploys designed by Ross and Netanyahu take new forms whenever the Arabs energetically pursue the mirage of negotiating peace with the Likud.



Soapbox

A really Egyptian car

The minister of industry was recently quoted as saying that studies are underway on a project aimed at producing a fully Egyptian car. The ministry's goal is a production rate of 100,000 such cars made and assembled in the country per year. According to the minister, the entry of the private sector into this field has added a new dimension to modernisation.

Without going into economic technicalities, industrialisation based on import substitution has no place in today's world, let alone tomorrow's. No country in the world produces a "fully indigenous" car. The Ford Fiesta, for instance, is made in 17 countries. The Austin and Morris no longer exist — and for good reason.

Since the '80s, trade has been growing increasingly intra-industrial, not inter-industrial — in other words, countries trade in parts, not whole products, in cases where they have a competitive advantage. It would be very costly, uneconomic and inefficient to produce a "whole" automobile internally.

There is nothing to be ashamed of here; it is not a matter of national pride, but of economics. The crux of the matter is to seek, indeed to create, competitive advantages. These must be made: competitive skills cannot be inherited. We may very well end up producing parts of cars for domestic use, or parts for export; but we should not strive to realise the myth of a "national car", entirely made and assembled inside the country by local technicians.

This week's Soapbox speaker is a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

Adel Beshai

A very exceptional country indeed

Why has the West made such a song and dance about Israel's "independence" celebrations? **Gamil Mattar** can't imagine

In the closing years of the 20th century, many countries have attained their 50th year as independent nations. It appears, however, that only one 50th anniversary merits celebration throughout the entire Western world. Moreover, the West is forcing its glee on this occasion down the throats of the entire world. In the age of globalised communications networks, the spectacles of joy that the dominant nations broadcast must delight us too, and the displays of anger or sorrow it disseminates should, supposedly, anger or sorrow us as well. Thus, we have been made participants — if only passively — in the international celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel. In like manner, the West compelled us to recognise that state; now, they are trying to make us accept that the Israeli formula for peace is the only one that complies with their definition of a just and lasting peace.

Still, there is a difference between a simple celebration and the excessive fanfare surrounding this particular event. In recent weeks, the sensationalism accompanying the spectacles of Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations have seemed limitless. The West's excess stands out sharply — at least to the peoples of the South — when contrasted with the commemoration of India's independence.

India, a subcontinent inhabited by hundreds of millions, with an ancient civilisation and a human heritage several thousands of years old, was, for many centuries, the jewel in the British crown. Empires fought over it, and their fortunes determined the prosperity — or poverty — of the Mediterranean and Arab seaports. As a result of India's place in colonial history, economic "globalisation" took its first steps.

Nevertheless, the anniversary of the independence of the subcontinent, whether from the Indian or Pakistani perspective, received no attention in the West, with the exception of Great Britain. Even Great Britain blundered embarrassingly on that occasion when Queen Elizabeth decided to visit Amritsar, in which the British forces had committed one of their most atrocious massacres.

By all objective standards, India merited a grander universal celebration of its independence than Israel. One justification alone would have been that it would have afforded the West the opportunity to offer a sincere and comprehensive apology for all the crimes it committed against the peoples of its former colonies in the nations of the South and the East. Such a recognition would have been an unprecedented opening for a historical reconciliation between the white West and the rest of the world. Moreover, it would have served as a powerful and appropriate response to the "clash of civilisations" idea currently monopolising academia and the think-tank circuit. Certainly, a celebration of independence on the scale with which the West is celebrating the creation of the state of Israel would have gone a long way towards mending the growing breach in relations between the West, particularly the US, and other regions of the world.

India may well have deserved the fanfare that has been dedicated to the anniversary celebrations in Israel. But then, Israel met a condition that India could not, and that sets it apart from the rest of the South and the East. Netanyahu, only a few days ago, alluded to this condition in a few short but very arrogant words. He said that Israel is preparing itself for a long struggle. The Israelis and the Arabs are at opposing ends in the on-going conflict raging between Western civilisation, of which Israel is a part, and Oriental civilisations, to which the Arabs belong.

Thus, Israel is being honoured as an outpost of the West in the East. But is that sufficient for its anniversary to merit such an excessive outpouring of acclaim? Western countries have numerous occasions worth honouring: the centennial celebrations of American independence, of the French revolution, of the Magna Carta. None of these have received nearly the amount of media attention that is being devoted to the Israeli anniversary celebrations. Never before has the US Congress unanimously passed a resolution commemorating the Magna Carta, for example. But it did so in the case of the 50th anniversary of Israel. Nor has an American president used the celebrations of one people in order to offend another. Yet, on this occasion, Clinton offended the sensitivities of millions of Arabs when he said that Palestine, when Israel was created, was no more than a barren desert. His hyperbole may have been intended to flatter Israel, but it certainly tarnished the image of the US as a supposedly honest broker — I will not say impartial intermediary, because the US has never and will never be impartial as far as Israel is concerned.

In London, too, Prime Minister Tony Blair rushed to play his part on-stage. He sang and danced along with the rest of the cabinet. His speech was predictable. The creation of the state of Israel was "one of the most momentous events of our age," he said, as if to remind us of Great Britain's fateful role in the sufferings of both the Jews and the Arabs in the Middle East from the end of World War I until today. In addition, his pronouncement that the creation of the state of Israel marked "a turning point in the 4,000-year-old history of an extraordinary people" is little more than an indicator of the racism that pervades British political thinking. In all events, however much Tony Blair imagined he was indulging the Israelis and the Jews, he, too, offended the feelings of millions of Arabs and perhaps many other not so extraordinary peoples.

Perhaps the Western celebrations of Israel's 50th anniversary reflect a subliminal sense of surprise that Israel has actually survived this long. In the course of the half century of its existence, Israel required the services of the UK, France and the US in turn. The first to give it birth, the second to nurture it in the cradle and the third to help it unleash its brutality. Perhaps Israel's continued dependency on one or more great powers is what generated the sense in Western capitals that it would not last. These doubts surrounding Israel's viability must still prevail; otherwise, why would the West make such a song and dance about it?

I also imagine that there is a deeply imbedded conviction in Western political thinking that Israel has entered a phase in which it threatens to consume itself. Part of the aim of the extravaganza in the West, therefore, is to give the Israelis self-confidence: to reassure them that they do have a state that is recognised by the rest of the world. The West, perhaps, seeks to put through the message that they can divest themselves of their persecution complex, because it will not permit other peoples in the region or elsewhere to treat the Israelis as anything but superior in civilisation and strength. That is why the Arabs must accept Israel's conditions.

If they do, it is hoped, Israeli self-confidence will increase and perhaps they will refrain from exercising their worst trait — their disposition to domestic strife. Netanyahu has largely confirmed this analysis. His path to national consensus has been based on securing unanimous support for refusing to make concessions to the Palestinians and to the Arabs in general, for treating the Arabs with the utmost arrogance, for taking every opportunity to insult them and for reneging on the "surrender" agreements, as he called them, signed by Rabin.

By resorting to every available means to humiliate and degrade the Palestinian people and to partition their land, the Israelis can bolster their confidence in themselves and in their leaders. Israeli analysts make no secret of their conviction that the government of Israel has planned for the day on which a Palestinian state is created, offering the necessary conditions to meet the goals of Israel. Such a state, in the Israeli conception, is an entity in which the Palestinian Authority's VIPs — as defined by their ability to move between the various areas subject to Palestinian control — believe themselves to be members of an autonomous state. In reality, however, the entity in which the bulk of the Palestinians will find themselves will be a collection of separate cantons, connected only by those individuals whom the Israeli government deems safe to consider "very important persons".

The extravagance in the celebration of Israel's creation has prompted a number of writers to raise questions, many of which had been previously voiced by Arab writers who were promptly accused of racism and extremism. Several observers, for example, brought up the exorbitant costs the West has borne on Israel's behalf for over a hundred years. Nor does it appear that Israel's demands for material and moral support will abate. Does Israel deserve all this? What is the value of the existence of a Jewish state which cannot provide its Jewish citizens with the security and stability that Jews in other countries enjoy?

What is the future of a state that emerged by a sleight of hand, and survived at the cost of a series of catastrophes? What kind of state ignited five regional wars in fifty years, yet failed to achieve the victory that would bring it security? The conflict is still raging, 100 years on. Israel and its Western supporters, in their excessive celebrations of its anniversary and their displays of contempt for the Arabs, have only succeeded in igniting new storms of racism in the Middle East, and in reawakening the spectre of violence.

The writer is the director of the Arab Centre for Development and Futuristic Research.

Party-crashers at the gates

The Zionists have been successful in promoting their cause culturally: Israelis are identified, in the West, with brave pioneers defending the frontiers of democracy against terrorist hordes. **James Zogby** finds, though, that even in the US, awareness of the Palestinian side of the story is increasing

American perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict were shaped by myth and prejudice. As described by one of Zionism's founders, Chaim Weizmann, in a 1930s appeal to supporters in the United States, the parties to the conflict in Palestine were, "on one side, the forces of destruction, the forces of the desert; and, on the other, standing firm, are the forces of civilisation and building. It is the old war of the desert against civilisation."

This stark and racist equation found no better expression than it did in the 1950s film *Exodus*, which defined for generations of Americans their images of Arabs and Jews. The Jews of *Exodus* were survivors of an infamous tragedy. But more than that, they were industrious and visionary pioneers who sought only to create a homeland where they and their children could find freedom. They were artists and musicians. They were brave and passionate, soldiers.

The Arabs of *Exodus*, on the other hand, were objectified as evil, lacking in human virtue. They were backward and liars. And they were cowards.

Millions read the book on which the film was based. The film itself was seen by tens of millions. And the theme song from the movie was, for many years, one of America's most popular tunes.

Actually, this entire Zionist effort was not only insidious, it was also quite clever. From the beginning, this movement had identified itself as a Western colonial enterprise. Zionists portrayed themselves, in Hertzl's words as "a rampart of Europe against Asia... an outpost of civilisation against barbarism."

In the United States, they defined their conquest in terms Americans would understand. They, the Zionists, depicted themselves as the pioneers and cowboys; the Arabs, therefore, were the Indians. In the end, the Zionists won not only on the battlefield in Palestine, they also won the cultural battle in the United States to define the images through which Americans would understand this conflict. In the face of this cultural onslaught, the Arabs stood defenseless. Jews had made their story into a centerpiece of popular culture, while the Arabs told the story of their tragedy to no one except themselves.

It was not that the Arabs had no story to tell, no powerful images to evoke. They simply did not enter the marketplace of ideas in the West. And when they did, they did so clumsily and artlessly.

For more than half a century, we have lived through this onslaught — this typecasting of Israelis as good and Arabs as evil, of Israelis as humans "just like Americans", and Arabs as a faceless enemy.

We have struggled to define ourselves against overwhelming odds and relentless campaigns. Arabs portrayed as bloodthirsty terrorists, Arabs depicted as wealthy and unworthy possessors of petrodollars. Through it all, Arab humanity was denied and our accomplishments and aspirations ignored.

But despite these campaigns against us and despite our failure to wage an effective and intelligent cultural campaign in the West, the struggle of our people is beginning to break through the stereotypes.

In this context, it is especially interesting to note the rather significant and, to some extent, surprising US press treatment of Israel's 50th anniversary.

Virtually every major US newspaper has devoted a series of articles to this event and, almost without exception, the coverage has been thoughtful and balanced. For example, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Times*, and *USA Today* have all run a number of pieces examining the 50 years from a variety of perspectives, with almost all of them focusing on the unfinished issues of peace and justice for the Palestinians.

Of special note has been the coverage provided by the *New York Times*, certainly the United States' most influential newspaper. Thus far the *Times* has devoted seven separate full-page articles to this series, all under the heading "Israel at 50".

The first in the series, entitled "Many voices, not all in unison in today's Israel", featured interviews with six different Israelis. Featured prominently among the six was an Israeli Arab who described the discrimination she has endured as a second-class citizen.

Next came a fascinating examination of the outcry created in Israel over a TV series that included a segment on the Palestinian national movement. The piece, called "Israel's history, viewed candidly, stirs a storm", discussed the "new historians" of Israel, who are for the first time publishing accounts of "the expulsions [of 1948]..., the killings of Arab civilians in border skirmishes and missed opportunities to negotiate with the Arabs".

The third in the *New York Times* series focused on economic matters and discussed Israel's evolution into a capitalist hi-tech oriented economy.

But it was the fourth piece that has been the most interesting. Entitled "Living with the Palestinian 'Catastrophe'", the full-page article documents the history of the Shikaki family. It begins with their expulsion from their village in 1948, reports on its subsequent destruction, and notes "the Shikakis farmed this land for generations, if not centuries, cultivating wheat, apricots, oranges and cucumbers... [After] May of 1948 they fled... and were never permitted back. Their house was demolished and their land given to the Jews."

The article then goes on to sympathetically describe the different paths taken by each of the Shikaki children: Fathi, the founder of Islamic Jihad, Khalil, the director of the Centre for Palestine Research and Studies, and Abdel-Aziz, a pharmaceuticals businessman.

The next article in the series presents the results of a *New York Times* poll on Israel entitled "For better or worse, Israel is special in US Eyes", while the sixth article was entitled "Jews and Arabs, painting a mural together, find a mosaic of distrust". This article describes the tensions that developed among three artists — an Israeli Jew, an Israeli Arab, and a West Bank Palestinian — as they worked together to create an artistic representation of their conflict.

This final piece in the series was a balanced treatment of the actual celebration of Israel's anniversary, including the demonstrations by rightists and peace activists at Jebel Abu Ghneim and a separate long article on Palestinian reactions to the day, during which they mourn their loss.

What has been exceptionally evident in the *Times* series and most of the other press treatments of the 50th anniversary is the extent to which Arab voices and Arab stories have figured prominently in the accounts. Despite Zionism's fervent efforts to deny the Arab human component to the conflict in Palestine, 50 years later it continues to weigh heavily on their story. As it is, notwithstanding Zionism's military conquest and cultural onslaught, this movement has been unable to erase Arab humanity from the equation in Palestine. The Palestinian demand for justice remains a significant issue that will not go away. And Palestinian voices continue to factor prominently throughout the US press stories of "Israel at 50".

In the end, the exclusionary myth could not totally conquer. Palestinians remain, and must be dealt with as equals. Their aspirations must be respected. Israel cannot commemorate its anniversary, even in the United States, without being reminded of its past. And it will not know peace until the injustices of that past have been repaired.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Master of tone



Said Shimi pays tribute to the late Wahid Farid, the man behind the camera in many of Egyptian cinema's finest films

Do'a Al-Karawan, one of dozens of landmark films on which Wahid Farid worked

"He is fond of photography!" With these words Wahid Farid was introduced by a relative to Ahmed Bey Salem, the director of Studio Misr in 1937. At the age of 18, orphaned, spellbound by the silver screen, and an employee of the Misr Company for Acting and Cinematography, Farid was seeking an opportunity to learn the craft of cinematography. The opportunity came with his relative's good offices which got him into Studio Misr. It was a meeting that decided the fate of the man who, for several decades, was the Egyptian cinemas' best cameraman.

The 18-year-old Farid was lucky to have begun in Studio Misr, the first Egyptian studio, built in 1935 to replicate the studios in Europe and Hollywood. Yet even there the apprenticeship of the young cinematographer was not without its hardships. The foreign cameramen who dominated the industry were generally evasive and reluctant when it came to accepting and training young Egyptians in their craft. Indeed Gaston Madri, the chief cameraman at Studio Misr, went so far as to prohibit Egyptian apprentices access to the sound stages when movies were being shot and it was only through the intervention of Hassan Dahish, an assistant cameraman, that Wahid finally gained access to the sound stage.

A few years later, with the outbreak of war in 1939, Farid and other Egyptian cameramen found themselves alone on the stages. All the foreign experts had left and the generation of Egyptian cinematographers including Abdel-Azim, Hassan Murad, Mustafa Hassan and Ahmed Khorshid, who had been apprenticed and acquired experience in Studio Misr, became the masters. Farid worked as assistant to most of them.

In 1947 Farid shot his first feature film as principal cameraman. The film was called *Ibn Al-Sharq* (Son of the East). Having proven his skill, he was commissioned to shoot three more films the same year: Kamel El-Tilmisani's *Al-Berimo* (First Prize), Hussein Fawzi's *Sabah Al-Kheir* (Good Morning) and Ibrahim Emara's *Gouz Al-Ithnain* (The Husband of Two). Farid's reputation as a cameraman capable of producing excellent work in record time grew, helping to secure his place at the top of his profession.

He was, perhaps, more responsible than anyone for the screen images of actresses such as Leila Murad, Faten Hamama and Lubna Abdel-Aziz. He dominated the light and musical genre, working with Farid El-Atrash, Mohamed Fawzi, Abdel-Halim Hafez, Anwar Wagdi and with Fairuz as a little girl. He worked relentlessly until 1994, later in his career moving into television, most notably with his work on *Damir Abla Hekmat* (Miss Hekmat's Conscience), directed by Enaam Mohamed Ali, and *La* (No) directed by Yehya El-Alami. He was the favourite camera-man of Faten Hamama, Farid El-Atrash and Abdel-Halim Hafez, all of whom were reluctant to accept anyone else in his place.

"In any film," he said, "my work as a cameraman is to capture and reflect beauty. My style is to integrate beauty into the general mood of the film. My shots always do justice to physical attraction, giving beauty its best chance by choosing the most suitable angle and at the same time, reflecting the general dramatic mood of the film. In this way, I am able to give the dramatic effects of the events taking place in the background without in any way undermining the hero's or heroine's beauty being foregrounded. "My style is clearly apparent in *Raya Wa Skina* directed by Salah Abu Seif in 1953 and *Shabab Imra'a* (A Woman's Youth) in 1956. Combining beauty and mood is, I believe, the essence of what is required in any dramatic work.

Farid's lighting of the faces of his actors and actresses remained a constant in his work. For him the faces of the hero and heroine should appear not merely faultless but practically angelic. His art came through at its best when he was filming Abdel-Halim Hafez. Farid noted that in his later films, as Abdel-Halim became increasingly ill, his face changed rapidly from one shooting session to the next. Simply ensuring continuity was testimony to Farid's skills.

Always more at home in the studio, where he could exercise complete control over lighting, Farid professed to being unhappy with a number of his later films, largely shot out of doors. Yet whatever his own estimation, little if any fault can be found with the camera technique in such films as *Do'a Al-Karawan* (The Nightingale's Song), *Ayamna Al-Helwa* (Our Happy Days), *Rodda Qalbi* (Return my Heart) and *Wa Islamah*. And the dusk scenes in *Bayn Al-Atlal* (Between the Remains) most surely count among the finest moments of Egyptian cinematography.

Whilst writing a book about the history of cinematography in Egypt I met with Farid a number of times. While he reminisced about the happy bygone days I admired the determination of his generation. Once, when we spoke about the use of colours in his films, he expressed his preference for bold colours. He said he occasionally introduced colour to pictures that made them look unreal and attributed these abrupt switches to some inner sense or intuition that the new colour was more appropriate for that specific situation. But he remained, in the end, enamoured of black and white films. Once, he told me, simply to get the tonalities right, he insisted during filming *Al-Habib Al-Maghoul* (the Unknown Lover) that the walls of the heroine's bedroom be painted navy blue and the furniture to be placed against them a particular shade of off white.

Wahid Farid's career spanned the history of Egyptian cinema. In 47 years he worked on 173 films. Strangely, he shot only one documentary film, *Tutankhamun*. He has left us a valuable visual legacy, a legacy that speaks forcefully of what can be achieved by those who love not only the medium in which they work, film, but know, too, the intimate secrets of the camera.

The writer is a director of cinematography.

Music

Love helps

David Blake hears where the real music comes from

Cairo Opera House Quartet: Pascale Rozier, piano and Osman El-Mahdy, violin; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 26 April

Musical memory will have no trouble retaining this concert. It was right, quite perfectly right in every essential. These players came, visited the Small Hall without much ado, little pre-performance assistance and a smallish audience, but the pay-off was remarkable. A performance showing great faith and loving assistance between the players of a work by Chausson new to Cairo, a clear, quite pure revelation of a unique and capriciously difficult work.

By 1899 Chausson was dead. His brief life slotted into a strange, disturbing, unsettled period — rather like now for a 1998 audience — fast making for the rubble heaps of war time. When he wrote *Concerto in D major Op 21 for violin, piano and string quartet* everything was on the slips, with music, as now, way out ahead of the other arts. The fissures and black holes would soon be opening to swallow Europe, but the establishment held fast. When Chausson wrote this work the surface was still proud and the *ancien regime* still glowed, even if it did not quite glitter. Peace, money, fashion: great salons operated as in the 18th century. Sargent and Boldini painted it.

Out of all of this came Chausson. No cinema, nothing electronic except electric fans for hot Parisian summer nights. The music is like the elegiac poetry of late Rome before it too fell down.

How to play this fugitive thing? These musicians, with tact, imagination and some sort of added piquancy of their own, almost a comment on the period itself, succeeded beyond any hope one might have had.

The newly formed quartet of the Opera House comprises Shamil Rashidov, violin, Walid El-Hamamsy, violin, Alaa Khalil, viola, and Eugene Vysotsky, cello. They formed an ever-moving and flowing, ever-active magic carpet for the two soloists, Pascale Rozier, piano, and Osman El-Mahdy, violin. The soloists enjoyed themselves as contrasting agents in the sound web. He, romantic, eloquent, full of attention and care, she dashing, setting a pace of powerful speed, a turbine driving the softness of the work with a firm hand. Chausson always has his eye on the piano and Rozier never let him down.

This work opens with three large powerful chords from the piano alone, metamorphosing into a form taken up by the rest of the players. As it swoops on its way the structure of the work is clearly seen. It is a strong, powerful, almost symphonic design, but decorated in the softer materials beloved of French composers. Essential to get this accent correct. They did. Paris, France it was on the eve of something momentous, and it trembled with excitement and anticipation. As the concerto approaches the end there is a strong, upward gush of arches of music, glissandi-like. Chopin had six ears for this powerful work. Nothing is neglected. The perversions of tempo, rhythm, line and colour ignore proper evaluation. The players began to put on further speed, seeming to improvise the music out of a lesson Chausson had given them before the performance. Go out and give the audience a mirage of civilisation.

Late things are always breathtaking. Will they make it before the edifice crumbles? Hereabouts it is Proustian, a slip-over into the 20th century. Civilisation is not that soft. Paris survived. Music continues to make marvels and the mansion in the Paris Faubourg where the first performance probably took place still stands.

What came before this unique manifestation of Chausson was Haydn's *Quartet Op 77 in G major* — strange choreography of classical music, the ability to change partners during the dance. The Haydn tunes were 20th century ones which the Cairo Opera House sang as if it was Cole Porter.

The Cairo Choral Society with the Akhnaten Chamber Opera and Orchestra: Mozart's Requiem and Vesperae Solennes de Confessore; Marilyn Coriege McCarthy, soprano, Gihan El-Nasser, contralto, Mohamed Abu El-Kheir, tenor, Raouf Zaidan, bass and Ashraf Swailam, bass; Larry P. Catlin, conductor and director; Ewart Hall, American University in Cairo; 29 April

The leap across Wolf's Glen — from the salon party of Chausson's concertos to the high classic formalism of Mozart's death rites on the other side is some leap across time and idiom. You need some sort of love to sustain you to get to the other side.

The Hapsburg emperor Leopold once warned Mozart that there would be no one to save him from his friends if he, the emperor, died. Mozart, small of form, had huge stature musically, a hard sharp tongue and a mocking manner. Icarus was born and his talent permitted him to be close to the sun, but when the sun set, leaving Mozart alone to the mercy of the great world, he soon died away.

The *Requiem* had taken him a long time to finish, but finished it was and just in time. Mozart was not quite sure about God. This *Requiem* begins simply enough, does all the right and expected things, an obeisance here or there to convention and fine funereal manners, and then, no longer able to keep the face that society demanded, Mozart lets fall the mask, and proceeds to die honestly and truthfully.

The majestic edifice he erected is terrifying, blood curdling. He was alone and vulnerable and the work becomes Promethean.

And it is here that Larry Catlin comes in, strangest of maestros. He gives away little in charisma and personality — nothing in personal contact except bland good manners. He is an untouchable, friendly wall. And then — he has visions. The opening solemn *Vesperae* were played as thoroughly ordained and horribly classical prayers, an impenetrable curtain of silver formality.

And then the *Requiem*. Catlin is good at requiems. Not long ago in this same hall he did a grand and touchingly intimate performance of the Verdi *Requiem*, which broke all rules of size and style of performance. Warm, candle-lit, loving and tender, it brought tears as well as refuge from the huge forces Verdi unleashes. But it was a requiem for a man, a loved friend of Verdi, and this Catlin revealed. Everything was in the notes.

For Mozart, Catlin took it halfway and, then, quietly, with assiduous faithful steps, he began his vision of the path upwards. It was astounding. Amadeus in his rather worn 18th century brocades disappeared. We have had enough of him in that guise anyway. Instead, he appeared as a Leonardoesque angel of the annunciation.

The ultimate, everyday mystery of death is forbidden to mortals. This *Requiem*, anyway, is not for a man, not even Mozart. It is a glimpse, devastatingly accurate, of an empire — the Hapsburg, Europe itself — a Rococo glimpse shrouded in something without meaning in words.

Verboten — road closed — but Leopold's little man and Catlin's art open the gates.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Federico Garcia Lorca
Spanish Cultural Centre, *20 Boutros Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. Daily exc Fri & Sat 11am-3pm. Until 14 May.*
Intimate photographs of Lorca, family and friends.

Ramses Younan
Espace Gallery, *1, Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thu 11am-2pm & 6-9pm. 12 - 24 May.*
Works by the painter, writer and pioneer surrealist.

Brecht Posters
Goethe Institute, *5 Al-Bustan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Mon-Thu 1pm-7pm, Fri 9am-noon.*
Exhibition of original posters of Brecht productions to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Hamid Abdullah
Mashrabiya Gallery, *8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 21 May.*
Selected works 1955-85.

Palestine 1923
Mubarak Public Library, *4, El-Tahawia St, off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel 336 0291. Daily exc Tue, 11 am-7 pm. 9-23 May.*
Rare photographs of Palestine in the early 1920s taken by Rudolf Lehnert.

Mervat Refaat & Irene Revri Thiele
Sheba Gallery, *6 Sri Lanka St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6192. Daily exc Fri, 10 am-8 pm. Until 6 June.*
Images of Sinai and the oases from the former, abstract batiks by the latter.

Fathy Afifi (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, *17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun 12 noon-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 30 May.*

Mohamed Abla
Goethe Institute, *5 Al-Bustan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Mon-Thu 1pm-7pm, Fri 9am-noon.*
New paintings and installation based on the Nile.

Robert Kappa (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, *Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 11 June.*
36 photographs by one of the century's most celebrated photojournalists.

Vivi Sylven
Extra Gallery, *3 Al-Nessim St, corner of Mortafa St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 May.*

Salah Zaki (Paintings in progress)
Mubarak Public Library, *4, El-Tahawia St, off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel 336 0291. Daily exc Tues, 11am-7pm. Until 14 May.*

Quality in Design, Quality in Use
British Council Gallery, *192 Sharia El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 3018391. Daily 9am-9 pm. Until 16 May.*
Exhibition of Finnish glassware design posters.

Days of Kom Gurab
Al-Hanager, *Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am - 10pm. 7-9 May.*
Photographic exhibition of the district of Kom Gurab.

David d'Agostino & Nazli Madkour
Akhnaton Gallery, *Centre of Arts, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 10 May.*
Installation with rope, nails, cloth and wall paintings from the former, 30 mixed media works exhibited under the collective title Palimpsest from the latter.

Student Art Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, *Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 24 May.*

Abdel-Aal
Doroub Gallery, *4 Latin America St, Garden City. Tel 354 7951. Until 12 May.*
Paintings under the title Girls from Egypt.

Ali Ezouik (Watercolours)
Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, *Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon. 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 13 May.*

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon. 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon. 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1, Kafour Al-Akhshidi St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10 am-6 pm.
Egypt's largest collection of 19th century European art.



Quality in Design, British Council

FILMS

Festival of Jiri Menzel Films
Cairo Opera House, Small Hall, [illegible]
Screenings [illegible]
11 May, [illegible] Cutting it Short
12 May, [illegible] Capricious Summer
13 May, [illegible] The Beggar's Opera
14 May, [illegible] My Little Sweet Village

I'll shoot him next time he kisses
Goethe Institute, [illegible]
Screenings [illegible]

L'il bob kessa akhira (Broken Images)
Goethe Institute, [illegible] 13 May, 7pm.
Screening [illegible] 1965 film.

Fountains of the sun
Goethe Institute, [illegible] 12 May, 7pm.
John Feeney's [illegible]

Italian Films
9 May, 7pm, Tutto Bene (1987) dir G Tornatore, with M Mastroianni.
10 May, 7pm, L'Ape Regina (1963) dir M Ferreri, with Marina Vlady.

Notes:
Commercial cinemas change their films on Wednesdays and small films on Mondays. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. [illegible]

Dantella (Lace)
Metro, [illegible] ***Normandy***, [illegible] ***Odeon II***, [illegible] ***Cosmos I***, [illegible] ***Cairo*** [illegible]
[illegible] and Elham Shahin quarrel [illegible]

LA Confidential
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 1084. [illegible] ***Ramsis Hilton II***, Corniche [illegible] ***Radio***, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Fools Rush In
Karim II, *15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.* ***Cairo Sheraton***, *Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.* ***Odeon III***, *4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*

Breakdown
Tahrir, *112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Al-Salam***, *65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.* ***Karim I***, *15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*
Starring Kurt Russel.

Copland
Odeon I, *4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*

Titanic
MGM Kolleyet Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. ***Cosmos II***, *12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Tiba I***, *Nasr City. Tel 262 1084. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.* ***Ramsis Hilton I***, *Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.*
Will it ever sink? Leonardo di Caprio and Kate Winslett.

El-Batal (The Hero)
Roxy, *Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Rivoli I***, *26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.* ***El-Haram***, *Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Diana***, *17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.* ***Lido***, *23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am,* [illegible]

Mogrem Maa Martabet El-Sharaf (A Criminal [illegible])
Miami, [illegible]

Beverly Hills Ninja
Renaissance, [illegible]

Ismailia Rah Gai (Ismailia Round Trip)
Rivoli II, [illegible]

DANCE

Three Ballets in One Act
Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, *Gezira. Tel* [illegible] *May,* [illegible]
[illegible] the Cairo Opera Ballet and Cairo Opera Orchestra.

MUSIC

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, *Gezira. Tel* [illegible] *May,* [illegible]
[illegible]

Song Recital
Main Hall, *Opera House, Gezira. Tel* [illegible] *12 May, 8pm.*
[illegible], New Zealand soprano, with [illegible] in a programme including Mozart, Tchaikovsky and Verdi.

Cairo American College Chamber Singers
Main Hall, *Opera House, Gezira. Tel* [illegible] *May, 8pm.*

Harp Recital
Main Hall, *Opera House, Gezira. Tel* [illegible] *12 May, 8pm.*
With Manal Mohieddin.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, *Gomhouriya St. Tel* [illegible] *May.*
Conducted by Salim Sahab.

Osiris Singers
Ewart Hall, *AUC main campus. Tel 357 6373. 12 May, 8pm.*
Selections from Broadway musicals directed by Larry P Catlin.

THEATRE

L'Anfitrione
Small Hall, *Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 7 May, 11 am & 8 May, 8pm.*
La Piazza di Roma, with [illegible]

Al-Arid (The Model)
Puppet Theatre, *Ataba Sq. Tel 5910954. Daily, 9pm.*

Khat Ahmar (Red Line)
Al-Tali'a, *Ataba Sq. Tel 5937948. Daily, 10pm.*

Shakespeare, One-Two
Al-Tali'a, *Ataba Sq. Tel 5937948. Daily, 7pm.*

Hubb Ma Qabl Al-Rahil (Love Before Departure)
National, *Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783/7782. Daily, 8.30pm.*

LECTURES

The Windsor Castle Padshahnama: Style and Ideology in Shah Jahan's Painted History
Room 203, Rare Books Library, AUC, *Corner of Sheikh Rihan and Mansour streets. 10 May, 5pm.*
Lecture by Ebba Koch, professor of Islamic art at the University of Vienna.

Andalusian Origin of the 1898 Generation
Spanish Cultural Centre, *20 Boutros Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. 11 May, 8pm.*
Lecture by Mohamed Mahmoud Lakki, professor of Andalusian literature, Cairo University.

A Postmodernist View of Muslim Learning
Netherlands Institute, *1, Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel: 340 0076. 7 May, 5.30pm.*
Lecture by Mohamed El-Scharqawi.

Bibliotheka Alexandrina: The Architecture for a 21st Century Library
Room 203, Rare Books Library, AUC, *Corner of Sheikh Rihan and Mansour streets. 10 May, 5pm.*
Lecture by Christophe Kapeller, an architect on the library project.

Francis Frith: Pioneer Photographer in Egypt
Room 203, Rare Books Library, AUC, *Corner of Sheikh Rihan and Mansour streets. 13 May, 5pm.*

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833

Compiled by
Injy El-Kashef

Around the galleries

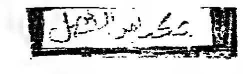
Salim Attiya

CROATIAN artists, 18 in all, exhibit their most recent work at the **Atelier du Caire**. These, in a variety of media, encompass a wide range of styles.

The **Round Gallery** of the Plastic Artists' Syndicate hosts works by **Adel Abdel-Rahman** and **Ola Youssef**. Though geometrical forms dominate Abdel-Rahman's work, more naturalistic ones Youssef's, both are concerned with the effect of light on form.

Extraordinary plastic sculptures in wood by **Salim Attiya** are on show at **Horus Gallery** at the Faculty of Art Education. Peacocks permutate into words, letters metamorphose into horses, fauna evolve into calligraphy.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***





A poet for all

"The bird returns to its nest and the child to its mother's breast" — words from Nizar Qabbani's last testament. Qabbani, who died last week in London at the age of 75 and was buried in his native Damascus, achieved unprecedented fame as an Arab poet, commanding a mass audience. The political stands struck in his later work fanned the flames of controversy to which Qabbani was never a stranger. Outspoken, never shying away from taboos, Qabbani nonetheless maintained a popularity that allowed him to abandon his career as a diplomat and concentrate full-time on his writing. Below, four Arab poets write about the Qabbani phenomenon

The man and the myth

Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi

I saw Nizar Qabbani for the first time in 1956, and though later I came to know him well and saw him many times, the way he looked in 1956 remained engraved in my memory. He was tall and very good looking, and his physical attributes blended gracefully with the way he moved and talked. His presence exuded an overwhelming combination of warmth and elegance.

No doubt the way he looked played an important role in the making of his fame. He was not just a famous poet like any other poet read, known and loved by a wide audience but, rather, there was a mythical element to his fame. Qabbani was known and loved by those who do not read poetry — even by those who do not read at all. There were elements other than love of poetry involved in knowing and loving Nizar Qabbani. One such element was the need to fantasise, to create an idol corresponding to fantasies that may have very little to do with the reality of the man idolised.

Thus Qabbani's public readings were unlike any other poetry readings. They were the talk of the town to which people from all classes and generations poured as if coming to behold a miracle. Often organisers of his poetry readings would have to bring in the police to maintain order. He was a star, as good looking as some movie stars if not better looking than most. And the poetry he read contributed to his image as an irresistibly charming man. It was rebellious poetry which directly and bravely attacked all taboos. His extreme popularity lent him immunity from the suppressive arm of the authorities offended by his denunciations. Add to this the fact that popular stars like Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, Um Kulthum, Abdel-Halim Hafiz and Nagat El-Saghira competed to put music to and sing words written by him, and you get a glory never attained before by any other Arab poet.

He acquired a fame which even Ahmed Shawqi, dubbed Prince of Poets, was unable to attain and this despite the fact that people's evaluation of Qabbani's poetic ability varied while that of Ahmed Shawqi was unanimously recognised by his contemporaries.

Acknowledging Qabbani's unprecedented fame does not mean that one should not ask whether or not this fame will immortalise his poetry. I, however, cannot answer such a question with any degree of certainty. Still, I can say that fame is not always a blessing and that it can lead a poet away from his poetry. Preoccupied as he becomes with satisfying his admirers, a poet may find himself listening to their applause rather than to his own voice or that of his dreams, weighing his words on the scale of stardom rather than on the scale of art. In my opinion, Qabbani will come down in the history of Arabic poetry as a famous poet. It is difficult to tell what will become of the Nizar Qabbani myth.

Qabbani is a confusing poet. Most of his readers do not pause before the questions his poetry raises though there are some who do and insist on an answer. His poetry seems, more often than not, very simple. His vocabulary is not unusual, his syntax is mundane and his rhyme schemes are not complex. In short, there is nothing philosophical about his poetry. This lack of philosophising is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it gives his poetry an attractive spontaneity. This very spontaneity, however, dilutes its character since it becomes merely a reaction to, rather than an act of critical engagement with, life.

Qabbani can write a poem about a telephone, a comb, lipstick, a woman with an a-la-garçon hairstyle, using all the mundane vocabulary used to describe such things. It is this simplicity that made some think of his poetry as naive and superficial. I do not think that this is fair. The simplicity of Qabbani's poetry does not mean that it is without value. It is true Qabbani can be read with great ease, but this does not mean that his poetry was written with the same degree of ease. He took great care to write in a way accessible to anyone and because of this his poetry will remain rich material for critics to analyse. We need to understand the cultural conditions that gave rise to a phenomenon like the Nizar Qabbani myth, to look beyond the mythical figure to understand and evaluate his craftsmanship, to appreciate fully his ability to reach out to so many and to distinguish between the transient and the durable in his poetry.

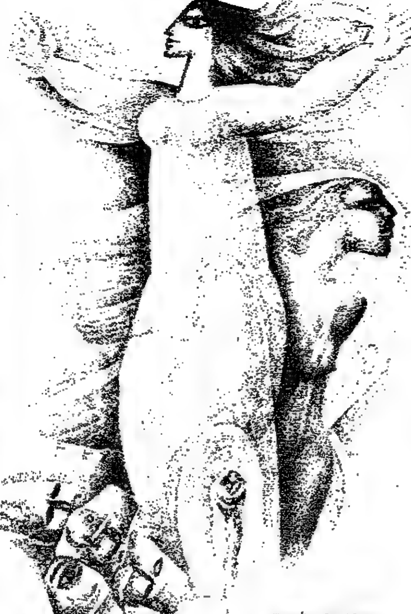


Illustration: Gamil Shafiq

'I have, since childhood, tried/ to draw those countries allegorically called Arab./ Countries that would forgive me/ if ever I broke the moon's glass/ and thank me for the love poem/ when I write one/ and allow me to love/ as freely as sparrows in trees'



Qabbani at Al-Ahram offices in Cairo,1960s

Qabbani's works

Qalit li Al-Samraa (The Dark One Said to Me), 1944; *Tefoulat Nahd* (Childhood of a Breast), 1948; *Samba* (Samba), 1949; *Inta li* (You are for Me), 1950; *Qasaid* (Poems), 1956; *Habibati* (My Beloved), 1961, *Al-Rasm b'il Kalimat* (Drawing with Words), 1966; *Hawamish ala Daftar Al-Naksa* (Marginalia on the Notebook of the [1967] Disaster), 1967; *Yawmiyyat Imraa la Mubaliya* (Diaries of an Indifferent Woman), 1968; *Qasaid Mutawahisha* (Wild Poems), 1970; *Kitab Al-Hubb* (The Book of Love), 1970; *Me'at Resalit Hubb* (One Hundred Messages of Love), 1970; *Ashaar Khariga ala Al-Qanoun* (Delinquent Poems), 1972; *Uhibik uhibik w'al Baqqia Taati* (I love you, I love you, and the Rest Follows), 1978; *Kulu Aam wa anti Habibati* (Every Year and You are my Beloved), 1978; *Ashhadu an la Imraa illa anti* (I Bear Witness that there is no Woman but You), 1979; *Mawawil Dimishqiya illa Qamar Baghdad* (Damascene Songs to the Moon of Baghdad), 1979; *Hakatha Aktubu Tarikh Al-Nissaa* (Thus I Write the History of Women), 1981; *Qamoos Al-Asheqeen* (The Dictionary of Lovers), 1981; *Ashaar Majnouna* (Mad Poems), 1983; *Al-Hub la Yaquf ala Al-Daw' Al-Ahmar* (Love Does not Stop at the Red Light), 1983; *W'al Kalimat Taarifu Al-Ghadab* (And Words Know Anger), 1983; *Qissati maa Al-Sh'ir* (My Story with Poetry), 1983; *Qasaid Maghdoub alaiha* (Scorned Poems), 1986; *Tazawajtik ayuha Al-Houreyya* (I married you O Liberty), 1988; *Joumhouriyat Janounstan* (The Republic of Crazyestan), 1988; *Al-Kabrit fi Yaddi wa Duwailatikum min Al-Warraq* (The Match is in my Hands and your Little Nation is Made of Paper), 1989; *Al-Awraq Al-Sirriya li Ashiq Qurmuti* (The Confidential Papers of a Lover), 1989; *La Ghalib illa Al-Hub* (No Victor Except Love), 1990; *Hawamish alla Al-Hawamish* (Marginalia around Marginalia), 1991; *Hal Tasmaeena Saheel Ahzani* (Can You Hear the Neighing of my Sorrows), 1991; *Ana Rajul Wahid wa anti Qabila min Al-Nisaa* (I am One Man and You are a Tribe of Women), 1993; *Khamsuna Aman fi Madih Al-Nisaa* (Fifty Years in Praise of Women), 1994; *Tanweeat Nizariya fi Maqamat Al-Ishq* (Nizarian Variations on Passion), 1996

Reconciling poetry and the people



Mahmoud Darwish

I feel something of the absurdity of life. What is the use of immortal poetry if the poet is mortal? When I heard the news of Qabbani's death I felt as though there was an unconscious dialogue between him and me, for I had just emerged from a coma when he passed away. Once, half-jokingly, I said to a friend, "I hope Nizar Qabbani does not die now, for I am not ready to receive such news." Now, as the news hits us, there is nothing we can do except perhaps become a little more humble, while at the same time cherish the precious hours of life.

Nizar Qabbani is the only Arab poet in the latter half of this century to manage, through his overwhelming presence, to effect a reconciliation between poetry and "the people". The real challenge a poet faces is to reach as many people as possible. And Qabbani was a man of consensus; a part of him will remain in each of us and in future generations.

Indeed, he was the poet most present in the collective heart of the Arabs, the man who wrote the most-listened-to poem, a poem that incited anger, love and respect for beauty. Qabbani's words are irresistibly echoed in our first love letters and memoirs...

He was obsessed with freedom to the point of anarchy and destruction. He was obsessed with women. Their shores were for him ports at which he arrived to a humiliated, threatened Arab land. The completion of his poetic journey coincided with the failure of another journey, the collective journey to a promised liberation of body and soul, one that would leave the tribal desert behind in order to arrive at the city, but which, instead, found itself back in the desert. The poet who had incited people to rebel screamed and, instead of singing, he began to curse: "When will they announce the death of the Arabs?" He did not need a new poetic idiom to curse; he could dish out the words from the Qabbani lexicon, one which had become hackneyed through overuse.

And this is why Nizar Qabbani must not be read poem by poem. An intelligent reading of Qabbani is a reading of his exceptional impact on the language of Arabic poetry. Before him, Arabic poetry was formal and grand. He inserted it into the language of everyday, modern life, thus making poetry a common property. His poetry accompanied kitchen utensils and became a fluid expression of the normal, the familiar and the simple in life, politics and sentiment. The reconciliation he effected was between poetry, on the one hand, and young students, housewives, clerks, professionals and heads of state, on the other.

He never paid attention to criticism. He broke away from the conventional and traditional structures of Arabic poetry without paying the least attention to what a modernist poet should aim to be or to related intellectual questions. He was heedless of the critical furor and controversy stirred up by the hooves of the wild horses he set free. He was accused of self-flagellation and male chauvinism, but he never paid any attention to such charges because he trusted his heart. He knew that he had loved women, that he did not use them for selfish purposes but, rather, made something of them. No poet before him had acknowledged the right of women to express freely and directly the secrets and ideas inhabiting their minds and bodies. He was not, however, a poet for women only; he was a poet for all.

Blessed be the quest



Saadi Youssef

Nizar Qabbani's early collection of poems *Qasaid* (Poems) remains my favorite. It is a collection which is both a quest for poetry and a question about the nature of poetry. In this collection he had his eyes wide open in selecting his material and choosing the angle through which to deal with this material. In other words, he was looking for poetry in what could become poetry, skillfully distinguishing between what is rubble and what is essence. Reading the collection, one cannot but appreciate his brilliance in selecting his topics. It is a varied and wide selection, one in which the poet and the personae inhabiting and moving through his texts attempt to understand the meaning of life. Man, in this collection, is not an abstraction or a general category, a mere means to a conceptual end, as would become the case in some of his later works.

Nizar Qabbani was also a liberation poet, and I mean this in the sociological rather than the political sense, where liberation is related to all phenomenon of social development in the Arab world. Qabbani's main concern was women's liberation. He began by first addressing women as a man, indeed as a man talking to a woman, and ended by adopting a feminine poetic persona.

Poetry before Nizar Qabbani was never that close to women or that concerned with women's issues. Perhaps in the history of Arabic poetry Umar Ibn Abi Rabia is the exception. But those women to whom the poetry of Abi Rabia addressed are very different from the women Qabbani addresses. Qabbani was the poet of the rebellious woman par excellence. In the city hall of Qairawan in Tunisia I saw those women. They flocked to the city hall from the suburbs and other cities. They ranged from teenagers to women in their late 50s, but they all shared the same excitement listening to Qabbani.

Qabbani once said that he would stop writing political poems and would return to writing poetry for women. I was glad to hear that, and I waited, but in vain. I am not too fond of Qabbani's political poems. They oscillate between destructive nihilism and uncontrolled generalisation — with very little poetry in them. I have no doubt that the bitterness behind these poems is genuine, from the heart, but politics, like anything else in poetry, must be dealt with aesthetically. In poetry, we must not allow ourselves to fall victim to politics the way we do in everyday life. The destruction caused by the mindless politicisation of everything must not extend to art for art is our last refuge.

So what was Nizar Qabbani's impact on modern Arabic poetry? Was he a school to be followed by younger poets? I do not think so. Qabbanism is not a house big enough to accommodate anyone other than Qabbani himself. And when we celebrate his memory, we celebrate the memory of a poet who is a fighter and a liberator, a friend and a fellow traveller on a difficult journey, the young man from Damascus who gave us the joy of the song and who entered our battles to emerge with pride. His house was built sometimes with effort, sometimes with joy, sometimes with anger, but whether daring or bitter, he was always the poet who loved play. If poetry is to be blessed, then blessed be the quest.

Bars, streets, sidewalks



Abbas Baidoun

Each of us has his own Nizar Qabbani: discovering Qabbani is a part of the process of self-discovery during youth. Collections like "The Dark One Told Me" or "Childhood of a Breast" or "You are for Me" inserted us right into the heart of our youth. Without them we would not have realized that youth has a language proper to itself or that adolescent longing and anxiety have a place in writing. The writing of Nizar Qabbani is of the same age as our youth, and I suppose it will remain so for every new generation. It is like a first dance. Rarely do we remember any of his poems as merely poetry. They are more like a part of days gone by. Once remembered, they bring back with them part of the self that is no longer. It is thus no surprise that each of us has in his life a season of Nizar Qabbani.

One cannot easily shelve Qabbani. He is not a book to be read then put away on a shelf or discarded. The book of Qabbani's poetry is not mere poetry. It is the book that vindicated the older generation in its view of the younger as merely adolescent and immature. It is the book we read to come closer to things other than poetry: Damascene decorations, enclosed gardens with fountains, city streets, neon-lit nights, beautiful fabrics, perfume and nightclubs. Qabbani's book is more closely related to these things than to poetry. In short, he wrote poetry that can easily be borrowed, spoken and considered one's own. It is light, free, fresh and playful. It is not modeled on any other poetry nor does it set itself up as a "masculine" model of poetry. It is even a bit feminine, coquettish, confessional, mannered and elegant — and always fraught with the colloquial and the daily: young people, bars, streets, sidewalks, staircases, the smell of smoking, drinking and perfumes, passion and restraint.

This is not a testimony or evaluation of Nizar Qabbani. His poetry is a message passed from one generation to the next and the singing of an era. Together with Abdel-Halim Hafiz, Abdel-Nasser and Um Kulthum, he is a pillar of a whole culture which, in turn, is a pillar of an age. Whether his presence in the life of each of us is explicit or hidden, he is undoubtedly there, present in the personal and collective narrative of us all. Every Arab poet knows that without Nizar Qabbani his poetry and the Arabic language would not have been where they are today.

Plain Talk

I often wonder how many people know about, let alone read, the different UNESCO publications. Going through some of their highly specialised magazines and pamphlets, one realises the great efforts spent in preparing and producing them. It must be terribly frustrating for those who produce these magazines that their efforts all too often end up in the waste paper basket.

Not so with me. I am always happy to receive UNESCO publications which provide handy references to many subjects that concern us, covering a wide range of topics from the environment and education to illiteracy, museums and development.

One particular publication which I find really illuminating is *Sources*, a magazine which appears monthly. It deals with issues varying from communication to bioethics, with a dozen other specialisations in between. One particular issue which I found fascinating was *Profession Artist*, which dealt in detail with the problems of professional artists.

The issue contained details about the life of a dancer in Bali, a painter in France, a Canadian film-maker, a Chinese calligrapher, musicians in the Cameroon, a theatre troupe in Peru, a poet in Lebanon and a Ukrainian author. The diverse working conditions of this mixed group are set against a common backdrop highlighting the state's role and responsibility in promoting the arts in an increasingly liberal atmosphere.

The leading article started with a well known though all too often ignored fact: whether they be painters, dancers or playwrights, professional artists of all stripes walk a tightrope.

"In industrialised countries they must fight to be considered professionals. With the exception of a handful of celebrities, few can survive solely by their art, while many live below the poverty line. This financial drama builds in developing countries where modernisation often threatens the artist's traditional role in society and work either in terms of creativity and freedom of expression or because of insufficient legal protection."

The status of the artist has preoccupied UNESCO for some time now. In 1980 UNESCO held a meeting in Belgrade to come up with recommendations concerning the status of the artist. Again, in June of last year, UNESCO organised another meeting in Paris which discussed what had actually resulted from the Belgrade recommendations.

The main goal of that meeting was to recognise that artists, writers etc constitute a profession, atypical but a profession nonetheless. Of course it is difficult to lump together such a motley crew and, rather than pretending to compare the situation of a writer with that of a dancer, the meeting stated that the unity of the profession came not "from details of the exercise thereof, but from the vocation of that profession within society. In short, that artistic development is vital for a harmonious society."

The document went on to say that member states have a duty to protect, defend and assist artists. It further called upon them to "make arrangements by close coordination of their policies relating to culture, education and employment among other things, to define a policy for providing material and moral support for artists."

Now the role of the state seems to be shrinking, either because of the decentralisation of administrative powers or because civil society has started taking responsibility for tasks previously left to government.

A number of proposals were considered during the Paris meeting. One of them was a proposal for a form of indirect government support, with laws stipulating, for example, that the contractor constructing a public building devotes 15 per cent of the budget to artistic installations. Of course there are always arguments for and against any kind of state interference in the arts.

Yet another issue raised by the meeting was that with globalisation "people are increasingly looking to market products outside their borders." But at what cost to local cultures, asked the conference. This is an issue which I shall deal with in a future column.

Mursi Saad El-Din















Tears of sorrow, tears of joy

George Bahgory attends the Golden Jubilee of Class of '48 at the American University in Cairo

The mention of 1948 reminds me of the first Palestinian war, but tonight's event is not dedicated to these sad memories. It is about celebrating the largest ever reunion of the graduates of the American University in Cairo: those who graduated between 1948 and 1998 have come here to attend the festivities of the jubilee.

On this occasion, after a separation of 20 years, I have been reunited with my brother, who has returned from his voluntary exile in Pennsylvania, where he teaches psychology. I stay with him all day long, and all night too, to make up for the twenty lost years. He has insisted that I attend the celebrations with him. We are together during the open day and I revel in the atmosphere filled with joy and laughter, but I refuse to accompany him to the gala dinner which will take place in a floating restaurant on the Nile, this evening. I hate both formal dress and occasions. I have no ticket. I am not wearing a suit. He relents, then, at the last minute pulls me towards him. Impulsively, I decide to follow him. I am dressed like a Montmartre artist and I am still carrying my sketchbook. At the door, I stand next to him, waiting to be admitted to paradise. Its entrance is guarded by a brigade of women — do they belong to Interpol? — armed with lists and charts. Every black circle on the chart represents a table, every table has numbers surrounding the dot.

The chairs are numbered. A woman walks towards me and examines me. Am I a thief who has entered the castle by scaling up the pipes, or have I come on a small boat and boarded the ship like a pirate ? "When did you graduate from AUC?" the woman asks sanctimoniously. I keep completely quiet. "Do you have a reservation?" Still I do not answer her. She turns her back on me and leaves. I understand that I have been ousted. I see the room throbbing with colours, even before I hear the music: the flowers seem to be singing the rich pleasures of life. This celebration is like the feasts in my village after the harvest. I am among the luminaries of this world, who now inhabit different lands. They have flown from everywhere to be here tonight and reminisce about their youth. My brother has taken his place among them.

All around I hear exclamations. "How you have aged… what white hair! The lines on the face, the neck, the eyes and forehead! Where do they come from?…You are so bald, when did you lose your hair?" They are all grandfathers and grandmothers and some are accompanied by their grandchildren. And I? I am lost, feeling all alone, like an abandoned child at a *moulid*. I burst into tears. My brother has forgotten me. But I dry my eyes and can now see the tears of joy in the guests' eyes. They are all doctors, several times over, respected and admired by those who know them. What am I doing here? I do not belong. I have no number, no seat and no invitation. I have come without caring about the formalities, as I usually do in our village, encouraged by my brother, who has now abandoned me.

The woman is weaving her way towards me. I had better leave in a hurry. I will say my goodbyes tomorrow, at the airport. Suddenly, I hear a clap of thunder, followed by a bright light. An angel in a silky white dress has descended upon me. "I have come to save you," she tells me softly. "My name is Mona Zaki, and I have added a chair, no 6, at your brother's table. Isn't your brother the savant from Pennsylvania? You will be sitting with *Dr Wafiya El-Hassani, Dr Mijan* Behman, Dr Mohamed Annous, Dr Ali Uthman, Dr Munira Sami and Dr Harry Said. You know them, of course?"

The programme is underway, emceed by Sophie Sarwat. The tears have washed my eyes clean. I am in a scientific museum. These people are visiting the museum because it is they who have created the exhibits.

When I sketch their features, I drown in their depths. I sense every detail of their lives, as if observing them through the window of their faces. I have renewed my art tonight. I engage in conversation and observe them, then sketch some more.

I draw what I see, and also what I don't see, but know. I look at the faces around me, and I am engulfed deeper and deeper in the lines, the shadows, the colours. They are gathered in groups of ten, bathing in the memories of the '40s, when they first met and their future stretched out ahead of them. All of them emigrated at one time or another. They have visited the universities of the world and have come today, carrying the difficult years on their backs, like trees that have borne thousands of fruits and flowers. They have gone to seed, and have become fragile, their hair has fallen and their bald spots are showing. Their spines have curved and they move slowly. Their steps are unsure. Their wrinkles are spreading around the eyes, digging into the sides of the noses, furrowing the foreheads. They are wearing glasses, having exhausted their eyes in studies. Their legs are weary from running through airports to catch their planes. But their smiles are larger than ever before, their mouths open in appreciation of a new joke. Wisdom has taken the place of their conscience, and they now receive the joys of life from the pages of a book. Their happiness stems from the sharing of their erudition. They are beacons for all the ships that venture on the seas of knowledge. They are crying on this special night, and I see their tears in every movement, every trembling of the hand.

When Wafiya El-Hassani comes to the podium, she utters only a few words: "I kept my identity in America for the past fifty years. I refused to carry an American passport. I have lived there, but my heart has remained here. I have come to you to refill my batteries with your love."



No, I don't

In the good old days, long before suffocative feminism, equal opportunity, political correctness and sexual harassment had invaded the media and become fashionable, marketable notions, baby girls learned the thousand and one subtle ways of getting what they wanted. They were taught when and how to say no — or yes — when propositioned by the other sex. In the playground, they knew that, if they lent their dolls to little boys, they would break them. For the same reason, later, they did not allow young men to play with their hearts. Growing up, they realised that they would be able to forge ahead, in part thanks to, or despite, their physical assets, and that the trick was to attain one's goal, then hang on to it — without necessarily giving away anything that they did not wish to give. In political surroundings, this fine art has come to be known as diplomacy.

A good mastery of the rules came in handy whenever women were looking for interesting career openings. If they were in doubt as to how to proceed, there were ladies' magazines to fill them in on the various intricate steps. How to dress, walk, stand, sit and smile on cue when confronting a prospective boss: these were the topics of many popular articles and several books, the written word often accompanied by simple sketches to assist the dim-witted. The general idea was to appear understatedly elegant, coyly reserved, with a slight emphasis on the former or the latter, according to the mood of the interviewer – a mood to which one was advised to be extremely sensitive. Furthermore, magazines — and mother —informed professional women, it helped considerably when one was very good at what one was going to do, if one planned to consolidate one's primary gains. The formula was to charm first, then, at the appropriate time, hit one's boss with one's vast intelligence and spirit of enterprise, thereby becoming an *invaluable asset in the* work place, never to be dispensed with. At this point, one could do away with the dizzy-blonde act.

For a majority of women, this script seemed to work perfectly. Besides, it was fun. After all, what greater pleasure for a woman than outwitting the unfair sex? It gave them that electrifying *je ne sais quoi* that stems only from a feeling of utter control.

Undoubtedly, baby boys had their own mentors who instructed them in the pertinent tricks of the trade, which were sure to greatly assist them in making the world their oyster. Success entailed, among other attributes, being well-groomed, looking intelligent yet honest, capable, dependable, hard-working and protective. If men could not achieve these goals, at least they could pretend. For them, too, the tutoring worked, and maybe the game brought equal thrills. Men were the predators, women the prey. This was the accepted order of things. As long as everyone stuck to his/her part and the children were tucked away in the nursery instead of cavorting in strangely shaped offices, all was well. We never heard of tales in which princes bullied fair maidens into performing distasteful acts, or of powerful bosses engaging in unspeakable groping sessions with recalcitrant secretaries. We certainly never heard of any of those damsels suing the rascal for offenses which they should have been fully capable of gracefully warding off in the first place. Contrary to common belief, men took no for an answer — and still do — when the word was uttered firmly. There were a few maniacs here and there, of course, but the law was expected to do its duty and deal efficiently with those.

Otherwise, if and when any encroachment upon good manners took place, it was usually by mutual consent. The movies of the period bear testimony to this state of affairs. After all, many a Hollywood star staked her talent on how convincingly she wooed an employer, then craftily directed him towards the altar, to become his loving wife and live happily ever after.

Clever women of my generation reached out and got what they wanted. They may have placed their bets on their appearance, or their esprit, but when they endured, it was generally because they had more to display than just a well-turned leg or a gift for clever repartee.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Fried chicken fingers

Ingredients:
1 kg. chicken fillets
1 large onion (grated)
2 eggs (whole)
1 cup breadcrumbs
1 bunch parsley leaves (finely chopped)
1 tbsp. soy sauce
1 tsp. crushed garlic
1 green chili pepper (finely chopped)
Frying oil
Salt + pepper + allspice

Method:
Wash the chicken fillets, dry them and mince them in an electric chopper. Mix them with the onion, one egg, parsley, garlic, soy sauce, spices, chili pepper, and half a cup of breadcrumbs. Hand blend them well until you make a consistent blend. Form into fingers. Beat the other egg with a dash of milk. Dip the chicken fingers in to coat them well, then roll them into the remaining breadcrumbs. Heat the oil well. Deep fry the chicken fingers until golden. Remove them onto paper kitchen towels. Serve hot with sautéed vegetables, a rich green salad and any kind of pasta.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Tales of the unexpected

Maggie Baigent eats out with the wannabes

"Expect the unexpected at Ciro's Pizza Pomodoro", proclaims the menu. I'm not sure what Ciro had in mind, but we certainly were unexpectedly and pleasantly surprised by the combination of quality and style we found there.

The two main influences on the decor seem to be that archetypal but elusive Italian restaurant (red and white checked tablecloths) and the Hollywood dream. On the photo-lined walls, the faces of the rich and famous vie for space with those — *Pizza Pomodoro regulars? — who merely* wannabe, while the ladies loo exhibits the downside of fame, with LA incident reports involving Hugh Grant and Janis Joplin, among others. With a magnificent Nile view and a stage set up for a live DJ/band, there is serious scope for having fun, and by 11.00pm the place was full of *shiny* happy people doing just that.

Given all this, one might expect serious eating to take second place. But we were very pleasantly surprised, not only by the attentive service — not always de rigeur in designer restaurants — but more importantly by the fresh ingredients and the careful cooking and presentation.

The menu is simple: starters, salads, pasta and pizza, plus a few meat dishes and desserts. The starters are mainly bread-based and would make a good snack in themselves. We chose Cheese Bread and Ciro's Tomato Bread. They turned out to be pizza bases with generous toppings, the tomato bread particularly good, with a well-blended cooked tomato sauce, strongly flavoured with garlic and basil. The Garlic Mushrooms were chopped button mushrooms in a bubbling hot, creamy garlicky sauce — as they should be, but aren't always *in this imperfect* world.

On to the main courses. There had to be at least one pizza, so Jo opted for a Royale, Marilyn Monroe's favourite. A nice touch this — in a menu otherwise expressed in refreshingly no-gimmick language, each pizza is labelled with its most famous fan, so you can choose your pizza according to your favourite star. I thought the pizza base became a little soggy with the added ingredients but Jo was well satisfied. Fiona's lasagne was cheesy and light and not very meaty, which could be a plus or a drawback, depending on how you like your lasagne, and the green salad was a perfect complement: crispy iceberg lettuce and a not-too-vinagery vinaigrette. My Pollo Napoletana was the least impressive of the three: it remained true to its description (chunks of chicken breast with fresh broccoli in a cream sauce) and was perfectly acceptable but a little bland. There was no time for dessert; the band was playing (really rather well, with competent versions of '70s and '80s dancing faves, and a good line in reggae and salsa) and it was time to dance.

Our final unexpected pleasure was the very reasonable bill. Prices go from LE4 to about LE40 over the menu, and drinking too is affordable if you stick to beer, with a very fair offer of one free drink for every Lowenbrau ordered. Our bill was LE184 plus taxes for the three of us. Pretty good for serious food and serious fun. Go early to concentrate on the former and later (after 10.30) for the latter, but do book in advance; Pizza Pomodoro is, not unexpectedly, seriously popular.

Ciro's Pizza Pomodoro, Nile Corniche, opposite the World Trade Centre. Tel 5796512
(Andrew Steele is on holiday)

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Drudge; victuals (4)
5. Cleaning necessities (5)
10. Request one's presence; bid (3)
13. Belief; confidence (5)
14. Incus; iron block for forging metals (5)
15. Fr. abb. for "company" (3)
16. Tiara, jumbled (5)
17. Impecunious (5)
18. Stately shade tree (3)
19. Sits in on; goes along with (7)
21. Ceaseless (7)
23. Impute; load; custody (6)
24. Enormously (6)
25. Indian princess (5)
27. ... days: period of youthful inexperience (5)
30. Electric unit, abb. (3)
33. Expression of pity or concern (4)
34. E. African soldier (6)
35. Muslim living in the Philippines (4)
37. Artist's work, collectively (5)
39. Suffix for "small", "female" or "imitation" (4)
40. Wild ass (6)
42. ... la douce (4)
44. Snaky letter (3)
45. Mother-of-pearl (5)
46. Algaroba tree (5)
47. Last segment of crustacean's abdomen (6)
49. Bewitch; beguile (6)
54. Soft woolen scarf with colourful, minutely detailed figures (7)
56. Bedecked; clothed (7)
57. Burro (3)
58. Paradox; derision (5)
60. Buy and sell (5)
61. Be recumbent (3)
62. Birds of prey (5)
63. Semi-aquatic fish-eating mammal (5)
64. Young son (3)
65. Weather directions (5)
66. Grain used for bread and fodder, pl. (4)

DOWN
1. Open space within cloisters; paddock (5)
2. Lasso (5)
3. Absolute; put in words (5)
4. Pop music that combines Punjabi folk traditions with Western pop music (7)
5. Without (4)
6. Item (3)
7. Boulevard (6)
8. Vagrant mongrel, hyph. wds. (5)
9. Cunning (7)
10. Introduce one or more acetyl groups into a compound (9)
11. Pit for storing grains, green feeds, etc. (4)
12. Fibre used in manufacture of carpets (4)
13. Fed. Ins. Ass. of Can. (4)
20. Tradesman; distributor (6)
22. Assuage thirst (5)
24. Strong sacking made of jute and hemp (7)
26. Nat. Auto Assoc. (3)
28. Craft and skill (4)
29. Kicks and bucket (4)
30. Ancient Egyptian deity represented as ram (4)
31. Feminine name (4)
32. Knowledgeable; experienced (9)
34. On the brink of (6)
36. Monsters; Cyclops, cockatrice and chimera (5)
38. Be off the mark (3)
41. Fish resembling snake (7)
45. Inciter, assistant in offence (7)
46. Wolflike wild dog (6)
48. Wild canary (5)
50. Spatter; foul; besmear (5)
51. Uric acid (5)
52. Quits one's hold on (5)
53. Reed; jumbled (4)
54. Grave clothes (4)
55. A continent (4)
56. Sway, jumbled (4)
59. Born (3)

Last week's solution

Pulling and pushing

Islamic Cairo as an open museum: the idea may not appeal to everyone. The city, after all, is a living entity; stripped of its vendors and workshops, its bright lights and bustling population, it may resemble nothing more than a ghost-town, with thoughtful dashes of local colour. **Mahmoud Bakr** reviews plans in the offing

Under the auspices of the governor of Cairo, Abdel-Rehim Shehata, the UNDP-sponsored Sustainable Development Programme recently celebrated Earth Day 1998 in collaboration with the Friends of the Environment and Development Association (FEDA) and the governorate of Cairo. The theme was the sustainable development of Fatimid Cairo, and a seminar was held on the governorate premises to celebrate the occasion.

Adli Bishai, director of the Sustainable Development Programme and the executive director of FEDA, described the goal of this year's Earth Day programme as the sustainable civilisational development of Fatimid Cairo. This initiative is aimed at the maintenance and restoration of this area, where the air is imbued with the fragrance of history and where monuments testify to the heritage of the city. The project, he said, was born 20 years ago, when many valuable studies undertaken by prestigious organisations were collected.

Randa Fouad, information consultant to the regional office for the Urban Management Programme in the Arab States, noted that the programme she represents collaborated a few years ago with the Sustainable Development Programme, in the study of the development of Fatimid Cairo, financed by a million-dollar grant from the Italian government. The study was completed, and the report submitted to the president of the republic. The government then took over the task of project implementation.

The governor's statement, read by his deputy, Ahmed Sultan, discussed the project for the restoration and development of Fatimid Cairo as necessarily comprising environmental, social, civilisational and economic dimensions. A committee was composed of the Antiquities Department, the Ministry of *Awqaf*, the Population Ministry, the Governorate of Cairo, and the Agency for the Development of Fatimid Cairo and began to prepare the implementation of the plan for the development of Fatimid Cairo. Their aim is to exploit this historical treasure as a viable economic project within the framework of sustainable development.

According to the governor, despite the enormous efforts being made, there are gaps in organisation, the distribution of roles and the arrangement of priorities for project implementation. Things should be moving faster, in order to counter shortcomings and gaps and to act effectively and without constraints in developing historical Cairo.

Gaballa A Gaballa, the secretary-general of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, noted that Fatimid Cairo accommodates numerous Islamic archaeological monuments, ranging from schools, mosques, Qur'anic schools, palaces, etc... Fatimid Cairo is a beacon of Islamic culture and learning, he said: the site of Al-Azhar Mosque and of Al-Mu'izz Street, on which no less than 27 Islamic monuments still stand to this day.

These priceless monuments stand in the midst of vegetable markets; posters are plastered on their walls, and rows of cars are squeezed into the narrow alleyways, he said. When the Fatimids built their city, it was strictly forbidden to drive an animal carrying a load of firewood or straw or to drive a horse down Al-Mu'izz Street.

Gaballa noted that ten monuments have been restored and work on seven more is ongoing. Preliminary activities are also underway for the restoration of the remaining monuments, so that they may be used again without exposing them to damage. A monument in itself has little value, Gaballa remarked, unless it can be used for some purpose. A symbiotic relation seems to exist between humans and antiquities: monuments cannot be restored and maintained at the expense of people, but are valuable insofar as they sustain and enhance human communities. He described them as "pull areas", with a strong economic potential.

According to engineer Michel Fouad, director of the project for the development of Fatimid Cairo, the area contains a staggering total of 313 ancient monuments. There are 630 shops, 30 per cent of which are architecturally or functionally at odds with their surroundings. Fatimid Cairo covers nearly four square kilometres, and accommodates a population of 310,000 — down from 400,000 inhabitants, an indication that the population is beginning to move out of the heart of the old city.

In his plan for the development of Fatimid Cairo, Fouad has earmarked six areas which are to become parking lots for motorists going to Al-Mu'izz Street. The parking lots are located at the periphery of the area. Transportation through the historical street will be halted between 10.00am and 10.00pm, during which time only light transport vehicles carrying goods to replenish stocks in the shops will be permitted to pass. The region between Bab Al-Futuh and Bab Zuweila will be transformed into an open museum.

Fouad's list of priorities includes the improvement of the sewage system, the water network, garbage disposal, traffic, the paving of Al-Mu'izz Street, the planting of trees, and the development of the areas of Qalawun, Al-Darb Al-Ahmar and Gamaliya. The first stage of the project, which will last between three and four years, will cost an estimated LE168 million. Funding will be provided from a myriad of sources: government, private investment, non-governmental organisations and international agencies, all of which are closely collaborating with the technical secretariat and the Agency for the Promotion of Studies on Fatimid Cairo.

The seminar recommended the establishment of four historical committees: a steering committee chaired by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, a committee chaired by Mrs Mubarak, an executive committee and a fund-raising committee to exercise its mandate at both the domestic and the international levels.

photos: Khaled Guweil





EYESORES, for some: the Gamaliya area remains a vibrant commercial district, with all the wear and tear that trade implies. The monuments are suffering, and the infrastructure cannot support the strain of the vehicles that wend their way through Fatimid Cairo's narrow streets, the vendors' carts parked against the wall of Ottoman fountains, and the stalls erected in the courtyards of mosques and palaces. Refuse collection is woefully inadequate. Can NGOs and the state combine their efforts to protect the monuments and give the inhabitants a stake in upgrading the area?

Getting help to help themselves

Parents of disabled students expressed their discontent with educational facilities in an unprecedented confrontation with officials. **Gihan Shahine** wonders whether this could herald the formation of a national task force for the mentally- and physically-challenged

"My son has not been accepted at any of the state-run specialised schools. Have some mercy." Khaled Ibrahim's voice is growing increasingly strained. His 8-year-old son, Mohamed, is deaf and mentally retarded. Because he has a dual disability, Mohamed was denied a place in both specialised government schools for the deaf and those for mentally handicapped children. "No school in Egypt takes children with multiple handicaps. I honestly don't know what to do with my son," Ibrahim says. He could place Mohamed in a private centre, but that would cost LE850 a month. His salary does not exceed LE300.

Mohamed is one of the children discussed at a one-day workshop organised by the non-governmental Association for Health and Environmental Development (AHED), in cooperation with the Integrated Care Society and the non-governmental organisation Support, Education and Training for Integration (SETI).

The workshop, held on 22 April, focused on the educational rights and needs of the disabled.

According to Dr Alaa Shukrallah, chairman of AHED, the workshop was designed primarily to help the disabled and their families form a task force through which they could express their demands directly. Such a task force will allow them to become independent from well-meaning campaigners and NGOs. The role of AHED, Shukrallah added, was to bring the disabled and their families together with officials and NGOs, and to give the parties a chance to discuss problems and possible solutions together in a friendly atmosphere.

According to the most conservative figures released by the Central Agency for Mobilisation and Statistics, there are over two million cases of disability in Egypt. In another seminar held earlier this year at the Red Crescent Society, statistics showed that there are as many as six million disabled people in Egypt.

The majority of disabled individuals in Egypt are children between infancy and 14 years of age. Only a fraction of this group is actually enrolled in schools. Although there are a total of 227 specialised government schools for the disabled in Egypt, they provide for well under ten per cent of their educational needs — some studies actually place the figure as low as two or three per cent.

"Obviously, disability is a major problem in Egypt," Shukrallah noted. "Education, however, is the most aggravating challenge for the disabled. The educational facilities provided for that sector of society are inadequate. That is why we dedicated this workshop, which should be the first in a long series tackling issues of disability, to education."

The workshop was based on studies of the educational needs of children with a variety of physical and mental disabilities. Each disability was introduced by a social researcher and the parents of a child suffering from the handicap in question. Family participants belonged to different social and economic backgrounds. Yet their needs seemed almost the same. Differences depended mainly on the type of disability afflicting their children. Multiple handicaps were top of the workshop's agenda. There are no statistics on or centres catering to those who have more than one disability.

"The multi-handicapped are those who suffer most," said Dr Mohamed Zuweila, a paediatrician, activist and the father of an eight-year-old boy who has a combined motor and hearing disability. "They are not accounted for in the educational services. All specialised schools accept children having only one type of disability."

With no other outlet for his energy, Zuweila's son has turned to drawing. His paintings are astounding encapsulations of energy, crying to be released.

"These children have capabilities. They are entitled to education and rehabilitation," Zuweila said. "All we are asking for is one class for children with multiple handicaps in the special schools," added the mother of a child with two disabilities.

The officials attending the workshop, most of them from the ministries of education and social affairs, conceded that multi-handicapped children are treated unfairly. They told the parents, however, that the government has recently begun to take them into consideration and will provide them with special schools once money is available. A case in point, they added, was the fact that the government recently nullified a law which denied the multi-handicapped the right to receive education.

"The problem cannot be solved overnight," said Mohamed Mohieddin, director of the department of education for the deaf at the Ministry of Education. "Special schools for the multi-handicapped mean not only new buildings, but also well-trained teachers and new programmes."

One of the most controversial issues raised throughout the workshop was the trend, currently gaining popularity worldwide, to enrol disabled children in the same schools, and sometimes the same classes, as other students. The guiding concept is the early integration of disabled children into society. In some industrialised countries, trained assistants were assigned to help disabled students catch up with their colleagues in the same class. Social researchers suggested that the application of this idea in Egypt would probably save a lot of money, time and effort, that would be wasted otherwise on building special schools.

Advocates of the integration approach introduced cases where early integration was beneficial for the mentally- and physically-challenged. They pointed out that the isolation of disabled children not only affects them psychologically but also enables society to disregard their needs.

Hala Abdel-Haq, an educational psychologist, presented eight successful cases of mentally-challenged children placed in "normal" classes.

Asmaa is one such case. Although mentally-challenged, she has successfully reached her second year in primary school. She is doing well in mathematics, dictation and reading. "Before joining school, Asmaa was in rather a bad state. Now she is closer to normal, which shows that the IQ can change according to one's environment," Abdel-Haq said.

"The government should not deprive our children of a chance to receive education with ordinary children. My son was not accepted in public schools when he was young because he is deaf. They thought he was retarded. He was finally accepted at a private school and, thanks to his integration with normal children, he is now in college," recounted one parent.

But are state-run schools prepared to deal with disabled children, when the system is overtaxed by the 60-odd students enrolled in each class? Are there enough well-trained teachers to deal with disabled students?

"Parents complain that the teachers who work in the field of disability are mostly incompetent," said Iglal Shenouda, a speech therapist who works in SETI's care and rehabilitation department. Every year, the government admits 200 to 300 graduates of the faculties of education to a one-year training course to qualify them for special education. But, Shenouda stated, only ten per cent of that number actually attend the course.

Hala Mahfouz, the presenter of a specialised TV programme for the deaf and mute, agreed. She explained that the majority of the graduates of Al-Amal Specialised School for the Deaf can hardly read or write — a clear indication that the standards of specialised educationalists are declining.

Mohieddin conceded that many teachers do not take the ministry's special courses because they obtain more lucrative contracts to work in the Gulf. To combat this phenomenon, however, the ministry has recently made plans to send a number of teachers abroad for special education training every year, as a possible incentive for teachers to specialise in the field.

Training teachers, however, will not be sufficient unless the syllabus is changed or adapted to different disabilities, Shenouda pointed out. Children who have motor problems, for example, should not be given long essays to write or practical tests in chemistry.

"Education should focus on teaching the disabled how to live independently," said Nawal Shehata, a psychologist at the public rehabilitation department of the Ministry of Social Affairs. "We should not be happy if a retarded child adds two numbers correctly. We should focus on whether the child can use that concept in every day life."

One of the achievements of which the government is proudest is the experimental day-care centre for deaf children in Helwan. Parents expressed their gratitude for the effort during the workshop, but also called for more nurseries all over the country which would also serve other types of disabilities.

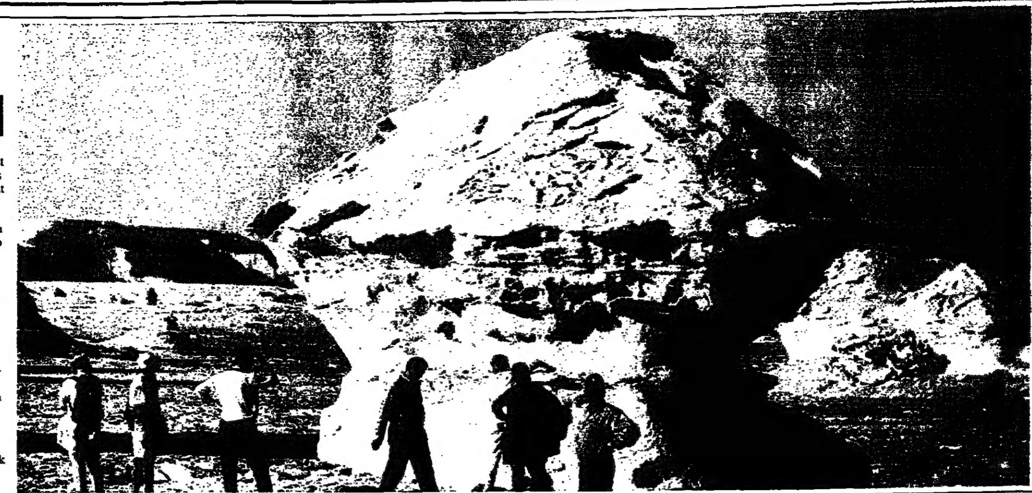
At the end of the eight-hour workshop, officials expressed readiness to work together with NGOs and the families of the disabled in meeting their educational needs. Mohieddin said the ministry welcomed the idea of placing disabled children in normal schools, and was taking steps to implement it in Egypt. According to him, items on the ministry's agenda include adapting the syllabus, establishing pre-school day-care centres for the disabled, furnishing specialised schools for the physically-challenged with ramps and other facilities to improve accessibility, rendering the examination system more flexible, and improving IQ tests conducted in public schools.

Money, however, is an obstacle. But, as Shukrallah noted, the workshop is one step forward on a long road.

"Families and social workers have figured out the problems and brought them into the limelight," he said. "More importantly, they should follow up on progress with officials, and, knowing the government cannot do everything alone, find out if other entities can help. The families of the disabled should start forming a task force. It is only here that we can start."

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**

Away from it all



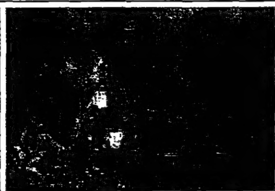
THE HIGHWAY from Giza to the farthest oasis of the Western Desert, Farafra, leads via 6 October City and Bahriya Oases. But short of the destination, 50 kilometres from Qasr Al-Farafra, writes **Salwa Al-Anani**, we suddenly found ourselves in a desert like no other. Its sand appeared to have the consistency of finely ground *castor sugar, or even a sea of flour.*

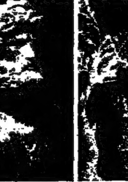
This is the "White Desert" and against this bleached and shimmering landscape, limestone formations appear, a motley series of strange, sculptured figures, fashioned by wind and time into abstract forms of remarkable beauty, animals and even plants.

A guide book for investment in the New Valley Governorate, suggests the establishment of camping sites in this area after a well, only four kilometres away, supplies the region with potable water.

Imagine camping in an open-air gallery where, over a 25-kilometre stretch of the desert, sculpture is on display, each a work of art, its label lying within the personal scope and vision of each individual.






Stele with offering by Ptolemy V, carving of a reptile, limestone statue of a woman, marble busts, and a decorative glass plaque of a satyr behind a woman with a crown holding a bunch of grapes are among the Ptolemaic objects on display. At the centre is a tapestry of victory (after Charles Lebrun). Below is an example of fine Fatimid workmanship, a coloured glass lamp

Les charmes de l'Orient

Among the special events to mark the 200th anniversary of Egyptian-French cultural relations, exhibitions will be held in France devoted to the Islamic and Ptolemaic periods. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

An exhibition of Fatimid objects dating from the 10th to 12th centuries opened in Paris on 27 April, followed on 6 May by an exhibition of Ptolemaic treasures, from Alexander the Great to Cleopatra. These two openings follow hard on the heels of the reopening of the Egyptian section of the Louvre with special halls devoted to Pharaonic, Graeco-*Roman and Coptic objects which, according to all* reports, is holding Paris spellbound.

According to Gaballa A. Gaballa, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), the first exhibition, entitled The Fatimids: Fascination of the Orient, has been designed to present "a peak of Arab culture in the Near East whose influence extended as far as Central Asia and Spain."

Some 230 objects are on display, covering various aspects of this brilliant civilisation, including art and architecture as well as artifacts from everyday life. Exhibits have been assembled from a number of sources: 83 objects from the Islamic Museum in Cairo and the *balance from various international* sources, among them the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Metropolitan in New York.

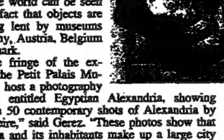
The objects from the Islamic Museum include fine woodwork *mihrabs* (where the *imam* would stand to give his Friday sermon), jewellery boxes inlaid with ivory and red wood, bronze statues, hexagonal marble stands, tombstones, linen clothing, votive inscriptions, rock crystal lamps, water jug filters and golden dinars bearing the names of the Fatimid caliphs.

"Europe is familiar with Pharaonic antiquities, but this is an opportunity to reveal the wealth of material from Egypt's later historical periods," said Gaballa. *The event* is hosted by the Paris-based Arab World Institute (Institut du Monde Arabe).

The second exhibition, The Glory of Alexandria, will run through 26 July and will include 300 works. "This period is not very well known to the general public," said Gaballa, "but it was a *brilliant* period, when schools of philosophy and poetry flourished in Alexandria, and the famous Museum and Library became a centre of culture for the whole of the Mediterranean world, displacing Athens."

An official of the French Embassy in Cairo confirmed that Ptolemaic art is not well known in France, but mentioned that excavations currently being carried out by Jean-Yves Empereur offshore at Qaitbey, on the site of the once famous Lighthouse, "are raising a keen interest among the public."

More than 100 pieces have been selected from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria and the Archaeological Museum in Tanta. Charlotte Gerez, press officer for the exhibition, said that other objects are being lent by the British Museum in London, the Brooklyn, Cleveland, Metropolitan and other museums in the US, and "also museums in Italy such as the Archaeological Museum of Naples and the Vatican Museum." The wealth of objects from the Ptolemaic period that have been distributed around the world can be seen from the fact that objects are also being lent by museums in Germany, Austria, Belgium and Denmark.

"On the fringe of the exhibition, the Petit Palais Museum will host a photography exhibition entitled Egyptian Alexandria, showing more than 50 contemporary shots of Alexandria by Carlos Freire," said Gerez. "These photos show that Alexandria and its inhabitants make up a large city where, at any street corner, at every glance, you can discover the archaeological strata accumulated over the centuries."

Mohamed Saleh, director of the Cairo Museum, who is also in charge of all Egyptian exhibitions at museums abroad, said that among the exhibits are three limestone heads and a red granite bust of Alexander the Great, two heads of Ptolemy IV and VI respectively, "as well as a head of Queen Arsinoe, and a collection of small polychrome wood statues and dancing dwarfs".

Ahmed Abdel-Fatah, director of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, added to the list: "Among the pieces selected for exhibition in France are six bronze statues of deities, Aphrodite and Mendora among them, examples of *mosaic glass, and six objects that have been sal*vaged from underwater, including two sphinxes, the torso of a king, the bust of a lady, part of the obelisk of Seti I, and four huge inscribed limestone blocks."

Egypt has long been trying to promote Alexandria as a travel destination, but the Mediterranean city has hitherto missed out on the enthusiasm visitors have shown for Egypt's other attractions. These exhibitions are expected to do much to focus attention on periods of Egyptian history other than Pharaonic.

Gaballa emphasised that the objects are being dispatched to France in accordance with SCA regu*lations regarding the exhibition of rare and fragile* antiquities abroad.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh *Square in Alexandria.* Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE346 for Egyptians, LE1145 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE254 for Egyptians, LE831 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE899 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE947 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***



Digging up a bumper year

The ancient town of Bakchias, in Fayoum, was the scene of excavation and discovery towards the end of last year. Work will continue when the 1998 *archaeological "season" begins in* October. **Samir Naoum** visited the site

A joint expedition from Bologne and Lecce universities has been digging in Kom Umm El-Atl, north-east of the Fayoum depression, since 1993, but 1997 proved to be a *bumper year.* Papyri discovered in the ruins cast light on such intriguing matters as the crop *yield sent to the an*cient temple at certain times of the year; part of a base of a sandstone statue of the crocodile-god Sobek was found, as well as a wooden cobra. These are three of the discoveries made by the mission which is under the direction of Paola Davoli *who is* enthusiastic about resuming work next season.




Rounding off the season at Kom Umm El-Atl *photo: Samir Naoum*

Kom Umm El-Atl lies near the famous Fayoum site of Kom Ushim where a small museum is located. Excavations have revealed that it was the site of ancient Bakchias and the main temple in the area was dedicated to Sobek.

"Original *search in the area* was concentrated on papyrus, for the sake of the papyrus itself," said Prof. Sergio Pernigotti of Bologne University. "But these days the search for the records is considered in a wider context; we are now looking for urban development."

Systematically excavating ancient Bakchias, a site untouched since it was first excavated a century ago, is an ambitious project. The remains of the ancient city extend over 50 acres and, in the words of scholars, it presents a wide variety of archaeological conditions.

Bakchias was plundered by *sebakhin,* peasant farmers who demolish ancient town sites — valuable for their organic material — for use as fertilizer in their fields. The walls of hundreds of buildings on the southern part of the mound *have been completely levelled,* but walls three to four metres high remain in the northern mound. In any case, excavations have brought the foundations of other buildings to light.

"One of our first discoveries was in a small square area, part of which was a house of typical urban architecture in Fayoum," said mission member Mario Capasso. *"It might have been the site of* a military garrison or even a guard house. A big jar buried in the ground could have served to store grain for its inhabitants. Then we discovered a big house near the western part of the mound, a beautiful building with walls preserved and divided into five communicating rooms."

The house provided a large quan*tity of pottery and* objects, including the handle of a sistrum made of bronze, amulets and "a big black pilgrim flask showing erotic scenes in relief on both sides". All the material dates back to the early years of Roman occupation.

"The first three seasons were devoted to the study of the urban layout of the ancient city," explained director of excavations Davoli. "During the fourth season we left the town area and started to dig around the main temple. Our aim is to study the relation between the temple and the ancient town, to protect the frail mud-brick buildings and to acquire more precise knowledge of the settlement," Davoli explained.

Despite the long Roman occupation of Egypt it is surprising how few remains there are, apart from the old Roman fortress of Babylon. It is one thing to boast of the discovery of beautiful objects, like part of a head-piece with eyebrow, which probably dates to the New Kingdom, or a small bronze statue of the Roman god of love. It is quite another to carry out long-term excavations that will cast light on time when Egypt was used for political ends, and the Fayoum depression was regarded as a bread basket for the Roman forces.

Keeping their distance

It's the 24th week of the league, and Ahli have consolidated the gap separating them from arch-rivals Zamalek. **Abeer Anwar** exercised her tape measure

Alexandria Stadium was the scene of this week's crucial match between Ahli and Ittihad. Ahli were determined to stay top of the league, especially after dropping two points in last week's matches. But Ittihad were never going to be an easy prey, especially in front of a packed home crowd.

The game got off to a quick start, with both teams attacking strongly whenever the opportunity arose. Ahli's Sayed Abdel-Hafeez got the first goal in the 13th minute of the first half, but it wasn't long before Ittihad's Ahmed El-Shazli replied with a goal for Ittihad after 28 minutes. Ibrahim Hassan, Ahli's star, put his team's second goal away in the 39th minute, and Ittihad's Mustafa Riyad had a near miss after 41 minutes. In extra time at the end of the first half, there was an incident when referee Gamal El-Ghandour disallowed a goal by Hossam Hassan for off-side. The Ahli players and fans exploded, screaming and shouting, but to no avail: they weren't to get their third goal.

In the second half, Ittihad poured everything they had into attack, but Ahli defended their lead successfully, and the match ended 2-1. Reiner Tsobel, Ahli's technical manager, said afterwards, "I am satisfied with the team's performance. They got past the obstacle of Ittihad. I also think that Hossam Hassan's goal should have stood."

Meanwhile, Zamalek beat a weak Shams 4-1 at the Military Academy Stadium. Zamalek took advantage of the lack of both a defence and an attack from the Shams team to win despite the unseasonably hot weather. This must have been the easiest match yet for Zamalek in their quest for the title. Sham's Reda El-Fadawi scored his team's only goal after 23 minutes of the first half, but Zamalek got more than even: Osama Nabih and Abdel-Hamid Bassiouni took three goals for their team in the 29th, 37th and 39th minutes of the first half. In the second half, Shams seemed even more helpless, and Mohamed Ramadan made it four for Zamalek in the 39th minute. Commenting on the match afterwards, Ruud Kroll, Zamalek's technical manager, said, "It was a one-sided match. The players did their best. They were full of enthusiasm for the three points so they could keep up their advance on the title."

Also last week, Masri surprised everyone by beating Ismaili 1-0 in front of their home crowd at Port Said Stadium. The only goal was scored by Yasser El-Shanawani in the 43rd minute of the first half. Ghazl El-Suez drew with Mansoura 1-1, Ghazl El-Mahalla drew with Minya 2-2, Aswan drew with Ittihad Othman 1-1 and Arab Contractors beat Suez 1-0.



Shams players falling in front of Zamalek's attacks

photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid

Fashanu found dead

THE SEARCH for the British soccer star who disappeared from his home in the eastern US state of Maryland after being charged with sexually assaulting a local teenager came to an end on Saturday when he was found hanged in an east London garage. Justin Fashanu, 37, had been set to coach a new minor-league soccer team in the town of Columbia. An orphan and a natural goal-scorer, he came to football relatively late, after failing to make his mark as a boxer. His career was cut short by a knee injury which refused to heal. In 1990, he was the first gay British soccer player to come out, in an interview with *The Sun* newspaper. An inquest into his death will be opened shortly.

Speak Français?

ENGLAND star Graeme Le Saux is working to teach French to English soccer fans who might attend the World Cup this summer. Le Saux, who comes from the Channel Islands where French is spoken alongside English, has taken part in a short promotion film — produced by the BBC — to encourage fans to learn French. BBC television will be presenting French language shows as the World Cup nears. The BBC also launched a website on Saturday that includes everyday soccer phrases.

Wrestling on

Ahmed El-Ashry is our only real hope of victory at the World Wrestling Championship which is slated for Cairo in August, **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

Following the African Wrestling Championship and the Grand Prix which were held in Cairo during the last ten days, the Egyptian national team now faces fierce competition on the African level, and they may no longer dominate the continent as they used to.

Our Graeco-Roman and free-wrestling national teams competed against ten African countries at the Cairo Stadium indoor complex and won their events triumphantly. Even our newly formed national women's team won second place on their international debut. However, we came only third out of 13 African, Asian and European countries in the Mostafa Ibrahim Trophy, which reveals several points of weakness.

Overall, Egypt won the 18th African Championship, comprised of the Graeco-Roman and free-wrestling events, taking 16 medals and 144 points. Six of the medals were gold, won by Ashraf El-Gharabli, Mohamed Abdel-Fattah, Karam Gaber, Ali Abu Taleb, Ahmed Esmat and Hisham Abdel-Moneim. Egypt also won four silver and six bronze medals. South Africa came in second place with 133 points and 11 medals: three gold, five silver and three bronze. Algeria came in third place with 91 points and 7 medals: two gold, three silver and two bronze.

A curious situation developed during the Grand Prix in the Graeco-Roman competition, as many Egyptian wrestlers refused to participate, claiming minor injuries. The two gold medals Egypt won in this competition were secured by Ahmed El-Ashry and Ahmed Esmat. El-Ashry gave the Egyptian audience a superb performance in his match against a Russian opponent. Both men utilised clever tactics and their standard was worthy of world class players. Out of 18 countries from Asia, Africa and Europe, Egypt took third place. Syria came in first, with 36 points, followed by Russia with 33 points.

In the women's third African Championship, Egypt's national team surprised even their coach Mohamed El-Ashram as they beat defending champions, Morocco, to take second place after Tunisia. The girls said they were proud of their achievement and they appreciated their parents' encouragement and cheers during the competition.

Ahmed El-Ashry and Ahmed Esmat, who earned Egypt's gold medals, are now our best hope for some serious silverware in the World Championships to be held in Egypt in August.

Edited by
Inas Mazhar

Al-Ahram Weekly

7 - 13 May 1998

Loula Zaqlama:

Barriers are for breaking

Business is her life. She is one of the top 50 women entrepreneurs — worldwide

photo: Sherif Sonbol

Thirty years ago, the word "businesswoman" was unfamiliar to Egyptian ears. Women doctors, lawyers and professors were fairly common — *but never businesswomen*. Money and business were the exclusive province of men. Thirty-seven years ago, however, a young woman of 19 broke into this closed world, fighting against both gender stereotypes and the socialist regime's determined opposition to the private sector. Loula Zaklama's tools for survival were limited but powerful: a profound knowledge of the advertising profession and the will to learn constantly. In this way, she carved out her place.

In 1998, after years of hard work, Zaklama was recognised by an international committee of economic experts, supervised by *Fortune magazine, as one of 50 leading women entrepreneurs*. In 1986, she was recognised by the International Advertising Association (IAA) as one of the top ten individuals who have contributed to the profession. At a ceremony in Chicago, she was awarded a medal of merit.

No wonder, then, that Zaklama's clothes, style, and way of talking and moving all give the impression that she is a real businesswoman: energetic, dynamic and full of stamina.

Zaklama is the first Arab woman to hold the *post of vice-president of the IAA, a pioneer in* the Egyptian advertising business in the '60s, and one of the first people to move into marketing research and public relations in the '80s. Always a go-getter, she was even the first woman in her family to work and have a career. "That was a big surprise to my family. They are from Assiut, I am an Upper Egyptian, and no woman in my family ever worked before. My family did not know any women who worked," she laughs.

She is also an active member of quite a few organisations: a board member of the American Chamber of Commerce, and former chair of its marketing committee; a member of the board of the IAA in Egypt and New York, of the European Society of Marketing Research, and of the Public Relations Association. Quite a Jane of all trades — and mastering all of them.

Fortune magazine's elected few share certain characteristics. First, these top women entrepreneurs have their own businesses: they are *not employees. Second, they build the business* themselves — no pampered heiresses here. They must be leaders in their field and, above all, they must have contributed to their society. Zaklama meets all these criteria. "My contribution was related to my business and to the profession itself," she explains.

In 1962, Zaklama started out, running the first private advertising agency in Egypt (there were public agencies, connected with newspapers). She did not choose the career, but "was thrown into it". *She is wry*, even today: "It was not at all easy and I would not wish upon my bitterest enemy — if I have any enemies — to go through what I went through."

In 1961, her husband, who was working for EgyptAir, thought of starting an advertising agency as a part-time job. He was then arrested and detained for political reasons. Loula was still a student at the American University in Cairo, only 19 but already a mother of two. "I was left alone. I had to survive," she says simply.

She decided to run her husband's company. At first, she had no idea of what the business was about, so she took advertising courses while still at university. "I had to read, understand and teach myself," she remembers.

Zaklama also had to struggle against the system. "Everything was against me — especially the socialist regime. I was defying the system because I was in the private sector at a time when only people working for the government were able to survive. Even men working in private companies were quitting. *I was fighting not against another company*, but against power." She admits, however, that there were beneficial aspects to these hard times. "I would not *have studied advertising so seriously* had I not been forced into it. Knowledge was my tool. I had no other means of putting up a fight."

Surprisingly, Zaklama says she never *had* problems as a woman invading a man's world. Her only problems stemmed from the fact that she was running a private company and was competing with the state for business. "Even now, I do not have problems because I am a woman. People just want high-quality work; they don't care if it is done by a *woman or a man*."

In the early '80s, Zaklama moved into marketing research and public relations. Circumstances at the time urged her to make that change. The Open Door policy of the late '70s paved the way for her shift into marketing research. "The Infitah meant that a lot of products were imported into Egypt. Consumers faced a lot of new choices. International and multinational companies began to operate in Egypt. The only way for these companies to market their products and get to the consumer was to understand consumers' needs. This defines what we do," she explains.

Marketing research deals with products and con*sumers' needs and behaviour. Loula's tips*: those entering the field should have a sense of endurance as well as the will to learn — and keep on learning. "*The first step to failure is to say I do not need to* learn, I know it all and I have done it all," she emphasises.

Zaklama has also had to fight to improve the advertising industry in Egypt by introducing the International Advertising Association (IAA) diploma to the American University in Cairo, and also by *bringing the international congress of the IAA*, held every two years in a different country, to Egypt for the first time. This year will witness the association's 36th congress, and Zaklama will be its chairwoman.

"This diploma is one of my contributions to the profession. It was a team effort, carried out four years ago. It was really difficult, though," Zaklama says. The diploma, the curriculum of which is supervised by the IAA, is recognised worldwide. The IAA was reluctant to work with AUC at first, since the association only grants accreditation after it has evaluated the university. "Here in Egypt, we know how strong this university is. When they were *sure of the university*, they gave us the accreditation. We worked until we got it through." Zaklama is clearly proud of her efforts — and *pleased with her success*.

At the IAA's international congress, 1,500 delegates of international advertising agencies, media men and experts on information technology will take part in the biggest advertising gathering worldwide. The congress will be held under the patronage of President Mubarak and the last session will be *chaired by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak*. "This congress is the best thing that can happen to a country, because it puts that country on the international map. It benefits the host country as far as economy, tourism and advertisement are concerned," she explains. "This is why the competition is always tough. We had to convince the IAA board that we have the necessary facilities as well as the ability to organise the congress and provide a good programme." As an active member of the IAA since 1968, Zaklama's job was to get the board's support.

Zaklama's dream was shared by all her colleagues. "Abdallah Abdel-Bari, former chairman of the board *of Al-Ahram Organisation, and a leader in* advertising, was always dreaming of holding this conference in Egypt. We went together to Zurich where the board meeting was held and where Egypt was chosen. Adel Afifi, *Al-Ahram*'s former general manager of advertising, also worked very hard with us. Unfortunately, they both died before they could see the fruits of their work," she says.

Then the Luxor massacre left tens of tourists dead. After the tragedy, some delegate cancellations were reported and some even suggested that the congress should be pulled out of Egypt. "We fought, talked and toured countries, asking our *friends* to support us," she says. It is obvious that to Zaklama, the conference was a deeply personal issue.

The support of the Arab countries was crucial. "They were all wonderful. They all gathered in Egypt and issued a report backing us. They were all supportive because this is a great opportunity to move the Middle East forward, to where it deserves to be," she exclaims.

Although Zaklama's work takes up most of her time, her house showcases the efforts of a devoted homemaker: oil paintings on the walls, silver trinkets, pottery, *small carpets* which splash the white tiles with colour. On the other hand, her Heliopolis office is sheer practicality: modern furniture, desks, shelves, *business magazines*, books, files and certificates praising her work.

The advertising industry in Egypt still has a long way to go, Zaklama says; laws and restrictions should be less stringent, she *argues*, and this, in turn, requires that advertisers regulate their profession themselves, by *respecting Egyptian culture. Her* adamant conviction that advertising is not just packaged illusions stems from sound business sense: "Consumers can be cheated once, but never again."

Zaklama also feels that TV advertising in Egypt is based not on the products themselves but on other elements — a famous actor, for instance — a ploy which distracts the consumer. "In my company we always measure the effectiveness of advertisements on people, and *I discovered that* people sometimes remember the name of the actor or actress appearing in the commercial, but not the name of the product. Worse, they sometimes confuse a product with a competitor," she says, horrified.

The 45-minute commercial break which precedes the last movie of the evening or the serial is also an ineffective ploy, she states firmly. "Six ads for shampoo are followed by six toothpaste ads, then ten for ceramics... People either get up and leave or get very confused," she explains.

Through her work in public relations, Zaklama promotes investments by explaining Egypt's economic potentials and investment facilities. "In order to convey Egypt's assets to people abroad, we needed a campaign to tell them what is going on. We provide *facts and figures* as well as current investment success stories, information we get from the Investment Authority or the Ministry of Economy."

Zaklama is also trying to lend a helping hand to reviving tourism through a PR campaign called "Embrace Egypt", launched at the initiative of the private tourism industry. The campaign targets the US and Europe. "We invited foreign security officials and dignitaries to come to Egypt and *investigate. This campaign* had positive results and may help in overcoming the current crisis," she says.

All these activities have exacted a toll. As a young woman, she was often on the verge of panic — "I did it, but this does not mean I managed." She also missed out on her daughters' childhood. "My mother and my mother-in-law took care of the children. At the time, I was *too busy studying*, running like mad to keep my few clients." Tears come to her eyes. "I gave up the pleasure of being *with my children. That's a high price to pay*."

Now Zaklama's daughters work with her. This is some consolation. And all that hard work did pay off personally. "They did not work the way I did and did not suffer like me because the company was already established and everything is fine. Now the hard days are over and we can reap the fruit."

Profile by **Rehab Saad**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ Darlings, I just atteded a wedding to beat all weddings, one that should inspire all those who are planning to tie the knot this summer. Water at weddings, I find, promotes the kind of romantic mood one likes to be in on such occasions — provided there is a great deal of it of course. This must have been what **Hanan Said Sonbol**, *media coordinator of the* American University in Cairo's Department of Theatre, Music, Art and Film, and **Samir Khairi Naguib** regional manager of Philips, had in mind when they decided that only a poolside reception would have that idyllic touch to crown a special wedding. Wisely, they chose the Cairo Meridien Hotel, where Cairo's most prominent politicians, writers, journalists, businessmen and public personalities were invited to dine and dance in a fairy tale setting, with the Nile flowing literally at their feet. I bet my dear friend **Nadia Makram Ebeid**, our minister of state for *Environmental* Affairs, and **Hanan**'s aunt otherwise, approved of the back-to-nature setting. At least she was not bothered by cigarette smoke.

I noticed the bride's and groom's fathers, respectively famous writer and columnist **Said Sonbol** and renowned anaesthetist Dr **Khairi Naguib**, admiring the incredible view, while their gorgeous wives engaged in joyful chatting, when they were not busy welcoming the guests. The DJs **Hani** and **Heba** rose to everyone's *expectations when the flamboyant voice* of **Celine Dion** soared, melting the hardest of hearts with the Titanic's theme song, *My Heart Will Go On*, followed by **Abdel-Halim Hafez** and *Ana Lak Ala Toul*. I bet that is what **Samir** was telling **Hanan** when the lights were dimmed for the slow dances.

♠ *This week is certainly resounding with the* sound of music: I just found out that our famous pianist **Ramzi Yassa** is in town, back from one of his extensive European tours. **Ramzi** does go around quite a lot, I must say, as befits an artist of his international reputation, but he never forgets to come back to Egypt and his numerous friends. This time, however, things might be *slightly different*. **Ramzi** could be here for a much longer stay. You are all dying to know what brings him to Cairo when the temperature is soaring and reasonable people are heading towards the beaches, and you would like me to tell you what I know and you don't, but I can only hint at what caught my eye yesterday in *Al-Ahram*: they simply referred to **Ramzi** *as the new director of the Opera House*. Nothing official yet — but if I were you I'd keep tuned in.





(l-r) [illegible]

